

Report to Pendle GC: 29 October 1993

There are a million and one things to write about and I hardly know where to begin. Tomorrow (I'm writing this late on Thursday evening) there is the vote on the *Ordination of Women Priests in the Church of England* and I have no idea which way the vote will go. John Gummer will be marshalling his backwoods troops against the change and many who would vote for the ordination of women are in their constituencies.

The vote was, no doubt intentionally, timetabled for a Friday when attendance at Westminster is generally thin and it follows today's Liberal Democrat supply day debate on crime - where there was no Labour Whip on. Anyway, we shall see what tomorrow brings. I shall, of course, be voting in favour of the measure while recognising the crazy situation we find ourselves in where MPs of every religion and none have a say in who should be priests in the established church. Disestablishment now!

Cops and robbers

Today, we had the Government's response to the Sheehy proposals on police pay, rank structure and conditions of service and while Howard has drawn back from many of the proposals to which the police were most antagonistic, much remains to cause disaffection. The reform of the police authorities is also coming up and this will keep the whole Crime/Police/Law and Order issue on the boil.

Local Government reorganisation is still bubbling away on the back-burner although the Government has now come down (more firmly) in favour of unitary - or single tier - authorities rather than keeping the existing two tier structure. Our first preference must be to press for the "unitary authorities on existing boundaries" model which our own council in Pendle is advocating. Their public consultation document is, I think, excellent. I am dead against the mega authority with a population of 500,000+ which has been publicly advocated by our MEP, Mike Hindley.

Although there are new guidelines setting out the Government's preferred option (unitary authorities but larger than the likes of Pendle) there is still a lot of confusion about how things will pan out in practice. We shall know soon enough which way the Government is going to jump with the decision on Cleveland on November 8. If the Government says Hartlepool can be a unitary authority on a population of 90,000 why can't Pendle be a unitary district on 85,000? And if the Forest of Dean on 75,000 gets unitary status all hell will break loose.

TECs £232m profit.

More lines on maps

And, talking of boundaries, the public inquiry on the Parliamentary boundary proposal is coming up over the horizon. A thousand thanks to everyone who wrote in to object. I think there is a very real chance of keeping the Ribble Valley wards out of Pendle - a precondition for turning Pendle into a safe Labour seat. The Inquiry starts in Preston on 29 November 1993 and should run for 3 to 4 days.

From the number of objections to the Ribble Valley/Pendle proposal, I suspect we'll take the lion's share of the time available. In the summary of objections published by the Boundary Commission, there were pages and pages on the Pendle/Ribble Valley issue. Anyone who wants to help should get in touch with the office. ASAP. This is a team effort and we'll all pitch in.

Rail privatisation hits the buffers

Next week will be dominated by the Railways Bill when we will be considering Lords amendments to allow BR to bid for franchises on the privatised routes. This is a good issue for us locally to campaign on. The state of the railway in North East Lancashire is so bad the public is particularly receptive to what we have to say.

In the Commons this week, there have been major debates or statements on the Health Service (abolition of the Regional Health Authorities), the Coal Industry, the Assisted Areas map and much else besides. We are currently in what is known as the spill-over session which clears the business from the summer. The new session in November takes us straight into the first "Unified Budget" on 30 November - where the debates will run for a week. It is supposed to marry the Government's taxation and spending decisions. All the stuff in the newspapers about Tory splits will re-surface then. Some Tory MPs are threatening to rebel on defence cuts, others on VAT, but who knows at this stage what they will do or where the axe will fall. If Clarke decides to increase direct taxation (as I suspect he may have to to tackle the £50 billion deficit) then civil war could break out on the benches opposite.

Conference and after

Within the Labour Party things have been happening too. The Conference seems light years away now but there were many important decisions taken. Smith's commitment to full employment was important. The decision on OMOV (whatever your views) will have important consequences as will the decision on quotas for women. The Shadow Cabinet elections were portrayed as farce by the media but that is not how I view developments. Harriet Harman went out of the Shadow Cabinet, as did Ann Clwyd, but women - like men - go down and up and no-one has a Shadow Cabinet place as of right. As it happens, four women were very close runners up and things could be very different next year.

On the policy side, Europe will still be important with the Euro elections coming up next June. There's much to talk about there. On Sunday here in Pendle I shall be speaking on the crisis in Kashmir.

Gordon Prentice MP 28.10.93

rules
revision

plant
dumped

Ann Taylor
Joyce Green
Dorothy
Clare Short

REPORT TO PENDLE G.C. - 24th SEPTEMBER 1993

We are on the verge of a busy and extremely interesting period in domestic politics. Next week's Party Conference has some important matters on the agenda, the outcome of which, will have a crucial bearing on how the Party conducts itself over the next few years.

The issue which has received most media attention is the whole question of Trade Union links. I have said in my separate report to all Members (which goes out today) that discussion of this issue has often generated more heat than light. For myself, I firmly believe the Trade Unions lie at the heart of the Labour Party and they should retain a central roll in Party policy making, on the NEC, and in the life of the Party generally. The NEC's report to Conference on Trade Union links is a good document that sets out the position very clearly.

On the topical question of Parliamentary selection and re-selection, I am firmly in favour of OMOV with trade unionists in affiliated unions coming into the Party as full members under the "Levy Plus" System - as put forward first by John Prescott in May and now by the NEC. On the NEC statement regarding electoral systems, if we are to move away from the "first past the post", I broadly support the working party's favoured system - the supplementary vote - which is a variant on the alternative vote which is itself, the eliminating ballot system which we use in our internal elections within the Party. I have reservations about some of the other NEC statements to Conference. In particular the one on economic policy which does not really address the issue of taxation. My own view is that we need a larger number of tax bands to replace the two we have at the moment.

BARMY B*****DS

Immediately after the Party Conference at Brighton, the media spotlight swings to Blackpool and what promises to be a most interesting Tory Party Conference. There is now open rebellion within the Conservative Party and the Prime Minister's stock has never been lower. The reports in today's newspapers that John Major does not believe in monetary union at all, takes my breath away. It is difficult to believe that an enormous chunk of the current Parliamentary session (the one that finishes next month) has been devoted to Maastricht, which is all about progress to economic and monetary union.

" MINOR MODULATIONS"

This Alice in Wonderland situation is reflected in another news item in today's Press, we read that the Minister of Open Government, William Waldegrave, has just told the Arms to Iraq Inquiry that he knew the guidelines were being breached but that this was not a change, it was an "minor modulation". He went to say "You cannot tell Parliament every modulation within operation of a policy - Parliament would be driven mad by this". I think I would prefer Parliament being driven mad by policy, when the alternative is having the wool pulled over its collective eyes.

At the August G.C., I spoke about the Government's agenda for the new Parliamentary Session and nothing very much has changed. It will be dominated by Law & Order - changes

to the structure of the police force, police terms & conditions and the Report of the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice which proposes to abolish jury trials in certain circumstances. We may also see legislation to privatise what is left of the coal industry and Post Office privatisation. We will also have the outcome of the Social Security reviews which is likely to have major implications for those on Benefit. But the event which will dominate the early part of the new Session will undoubtedly be the first Unified Budget on the 30th November which brings together the Government's tax and spending plans. This replaces the November Autumn Statement (which set out spending plans) and the March Budget. We want to see if the VAT burden is extended to zero rated goods and what other action is taken to bring down the £50 billion deficit.

KEEP PENDLE LOCAL

Away from Parliament, we will have a number of critically important matters coming up. There is the Parliamentary Boundary Commission Inquiry, the Report of the European Parliamentary Boundary Commission (which proposes the abolition of Mike Hindley's Lancashire East Seat and the incorporation of Pendle into Lancashire Central) and the Local Government Commission, who start work this month on Pendle. I shall be writing to the Commission setting out my own view which is firmly in support of a unitary Pendle based on existing boundaries. It may well be that in the long run, this will not be a sustainable position, but there is no evidence that smaller Authorities cannot be better ones. Even now, in Scotland and Wales, local authorities are being proposed and are likely to be set in place which are smaller than Pendle is now. I am absolutely opposed to the creation of a mega Council for North East Lancashire as has been argued by some people.

I am conscious that the Berough Council elections are just over the horizon and we really need to get the Liberal Democrats in our sights. I have just received a bundle of excellent material from Jack Straw which I shall copy to the Group and Party.

GORDON PRENTICE MP

24.9.93.

REPORT TO PENDLE G.C. - 27th AUGUST 1993

AWAY FROM WESTMINSTER

A year ago this month, I recall saying in my Parliamentary Report to all Members that "Maastricht is likely to be very controversial. How far do we go down the road towards a European Union? Do we want and do we need a common currency? Is there an alternative?" When I wrote that I had no idea that the issue would split the Tory Party in two. Half the MPs at Westminster loath Major and the other half simply tolerates him. If the position of the Tories does not improve dramatically in next year's Council and European Elections - and I doubt it will - then there is no doubt in my mind that Major will be knifed between the shoulder blades. The great irony, of course, is that after spending so much time, effort and energy on Maastricht, the original concept of a European Union simply will not materialise. Maastricht would have lead to a two tier Europe with Britain on the periphery and what is now needed is a real debate within the Party on what the central elements of our European Policy should be.

THE AUTUMN AGENDA

Although it is high summer, the issues which will dominate the political agenda in the autumn are there bubbling away just beneath the surface. Law and order will be at centre stage and we have already had hints from Howard on how he is intending to play it at the Tory party Conference. Howard's talk of a stricter regime in our prisons hardly fits with the conditions in the Wolds prison - managed by Group 4 (Board Member & Tory Party Chairman - Sir Norman Fowler) which have dominated our T.V. screens this week. The Sheehy Report on police employment conditions and the report of the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice (restricting jury trials) will form the basis of new legislation next session.

Elsewhere, rail privatisation and the situation in the coal industry will still be big issues as will the long awaited announcement on the privatisation of the Post Office. If the Tories go ahead with the latter they will be walking into a swamp. The 8,000 signatures we got on our post office petition show the strength of public feeling on all things to do with the Post Office. There are major practical difficulties on forcing through a privatisation bill which creates a market, but still provides postal services to the nation at uniform costs and quality. As it is, the Treasury uses the Post Office as a milk-cow - the Post Office's contributions to the Government are to be increased from £68m this year (93/94) to £181m for

1994/95 an increase of 250%. It is no wonder the price of stamps is going up!

Other issues are waiting to break the surface. For example Health. We have the proposed merger of the Blackburn, Hyndburn & Ribble Valley and Burnley, Pendle & Rossendale Health Authorities (consultation period closes 9th November). Unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, is a dominant issue, especially here in Pendle, where the July figure is the highest for a year. Then there is local government re-organisation and everything that flows from that. (The Council's Keep Pendle Local campaign is superb and much credit should go to those who devised it.) But although these matters are immensely important, the key issue in the autumn will be the £50 billion deficit and how the Tories propose to bring it down. Some Tories on the wet wing, such as Keith Hampson, have suggested increasing the top rate of tax to 45p in the £. The more likely solution will be a savage cut-back in benefits for the most vulnerable in our society. And the Pensioners too will be paying their share. Here in Pendle, there are 16,260 Pensioners who will have to pay VAT on fuel and fewer than half of them (47%) are on means tested benefits. The other 8,620 are likely to get no extra help at all.

POVERTY ON THE INCREASE

We shall shortly know the outcome of Peter Lilley's Social Security reviews and there is no doubt it will impact very harshly in areas such as North East Lancashire which has higher **than average levels of poverty**. Poverty manifests itself in many ways and I am sure this plays a part in the low birth weight of babies born in Pendle & Burnley and the high perinatal mortality figures. In today's Guardian, figures were given which show the enormous increase in poverty since the April 1992 General Election. Those claiming an average £2.46 in Income Support increased from 5,080,000 to 5,510,000 between May and November. The same article tells us of the amazing increase in the numbers of people claiming Benefit. The number of people dependent on Income Support has increased to nearly 10 million, or not much short of one in five of the population.

THE COST TO PENDLE

The Tories have made a real mess of running the economy, as statistics for our own area demonstrate:

*In June unemployment here was 2928 (although now gone up to 3200). In that month 809 people had been out of work for more than a year.

*The Government's official figures on the cost of unemployment are £9,000 per person per year, so the cost of unemployment in Pendle since the Election has been no less than £32 million.

*Under the Tory Government, the Government debt is more than £204 billion, this means the Tories owe £3500 for every man, woman & child in Pendle.

* Manufacturing investment is still below the level of 1979. If investment had remained at the 1979 levels, an extra £15.7 billion would have been invested an extra investment of £272 for every man, woman and child in Pendle.

INSIDE THE PARTY

At the June G.C. I mentioned the raging debate within the PLP on the number of women to be voted for in the Shadow Cabinet elections. Fortunately, there was a change of mind within the PLP and the rule now is that every MP is obliged to vote for a minimum of four women for the Shadow Cabinet. There has been much speculation about Brian Gould and we wait to see whether he will stand again for the Shadow Cabinet, having resigned last year over Maastricht.

WINNING PEOPLE OVER

Today's Press revealed that Labour's support had dropped a couple of points to 42%, with the Tories bottoming out at 28% and the Liberal/Democrats' rating is unchanged at 25%. Our poll ratings always dip during the summer when Parliament is in recess and the Lib./Dems. have had the additional boost of two by-elections at Newbury & Christchurch which were theirs for the taking. There was never the remotest possibility of Labour winning either seat. You have read about the recent paper Jack Straw did for the Shadow Cabinet on the Liberal/Democrats' threat. It is mostly common sense and tells us nothing we did not already know. However, if there is one thing we can learn from the Lib./Dems., it is the importance of constant campaigning - not necessarily imposing our agenda on other people, but supporting them when their agenda and ours coincide. The very successful petitions we have done this year on the Post Office, on the threat to local Chemist shops on the T.V. campaign for West Craven, show how it is possible to get people on board by supporting issues

which they consider to be important. LoLs of other local issues fall into this category and it is our job to identify them.

Out and About

I have been doing the usual round of Galas and so on and have been thoroughly enjoying myself. The Trawden Agricultural Show is really something else. This year was the first time for me and I was greatly impressed. Tomorrow I shall be at the Barrowford Show and next week I shall be dropping in to Bell Woven Labels at Colne.

GORDON PRENTICE MP 27.8.93.

Report to Pendle GC: 27 August 1993 - notes

Membership GP's; what's coming up. Post Office privatisation, railways, coal etc. local issues - number of peinatal deaths. Visit to Burnley General. Other local sssues Local Govt reorganisation. Ssan meretring commissioners on Tuesday. Guide-lines in September . Within Party Gould challenge. The taxation debate. Hampson suggesting 45p and Brown diotching spending pledges? Taxation debate should be about fairness. Peter Lilley's review of Social Security. Equalising pensions (upwards to 65) Tory MPs seem to approve. Number of women in shadow cabinet minimum 4. Jurrasic Park. Tories playing to the audience at Conference. Yet had the saga of the wolds prison the first private prison in UK run by Norman Fowler's Group 4. Need to reinvigorate the Party

Out and about: Girls Brigade; Nelson Smallholders, Barlick Gala, Trawden Agric Show. Conference coming up. Barrowford.

Report to Pendle GC: 30 July 1993

Sally will have given my apologies for absence at tonight's GC but I have to be in Ireland on family business. This is unfortunate, I know, because the past week has been simply incredible. A real kaleidoscope of rumour, debate, intrigue and tied votes - culminating in the vote of confidence last Friday. A vote called not by us but by the Prime Minister. Can you believe it?

What a bunch of B*****s!

Anyway, we now know *officially* what we have all known *unofficially*; John Major's cabinet is full of bastards! He is extremely lucky his unguarded remarks came at the end of the Parliamentary session when we had no opportunity to quiz him on this little slip up. The chance will come soon enough.

Maastricht has now gone through Parliament and the Government is now free to ratify the Treaty but it has suffered terrible damage on the way. Those who have been here at Westminster a while tell me they have never seen anything like it. Tory MPs in the lobbies and corridors openly slagging off their colleagues. It will take a long time for the wounds to heal. My own view (which the GC is aware of) is that Maastricht in the terms envisaged simply won't materialise. The Treaty is supposed to pave the way to economic and monetary union with a single currency. The ERM was designed to be a stage along the way and that has now all but collapsed.

Are Southern Tories revolting?

I am writing this on Wednesday evening before the Christchurch by election result but I am pretty sure the Tories will lose. I was down there last week doing my bit to help the Labour candidate and it was plain to me that Labour would be squeezed massively (from a very modest vote anyway) and that the Lib Dems were in line to take the seat - the 16th safest Tory seat in England, I recall.

A Lib Dem victory (if that is what happens) will be won on a protest vote. I cannot see the seat doing anything but returning to the Tories at the General Election. We must be alive to the Liberal threat in Pendle if the bandwagon begins to roll and that means pointing up the inconsistencies and confusions in the various Lib Dem positions. I thought the Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, put it quite well in the debate last Friday when he described Paddy Ashdown as a "Master Tailor" - "someone who deftly measures up

his audience and tailors his opinions to fit". (I paraphrase but that's the gist.

There are many political opportunities opening up for us in the months ahead. There are the prospects of the next tranche of privatisations that are likely to go disastrously wrong for the Tories. Any move to privatise the Post Office will be greeted with real anger - and dismay. The railways privatisation is likely to go off the tracks at an early stage as no-one has yet been able to identify the private sector operators who are supposed to be lining up to take over the franchise areas. In education, the teachers are disaffected and the Education Secretary, John Patten, known at Westminster for his arrogance and foppishness is laid up in bed recovering from a virus or from some kind of nervous breakdown!

More revelations to come

We still have more revelations to come in the "arms to Iraq" inquiry and Asil Nadir is still out there in Northern Cyprus plotting his revenge against the Tory Party that tolerated him for so long as he was shovelling cash into the Tory Party coffers. We also have the prospect of big cuts in the welfare state and a further assault on benefits as the Tories struggle to get the £50 billion deficit down. These events give us a real opportunity in the Labour Party to consolidate our position here in Pendle and they provide a platform for next May's Borough Council elections.

My latest newsletter to all Pendle CLP members will be going out early next week and I have highlighted the campaigning theme.

Gordon Prentice MP
28 July 1993

REPORT TO PENDLE G.C. - 24 JUNE 93

Defence Jobs on the Line

I'm writing this on Thursday evening while waiting for the vote on the Devonport/Rosyth Dockyard issue. I had intended to leave for Pendle this evening and then the Trident Refit issue blew up and we've all been told to stay at Westminster for the ten o'clock vote. The Tories say (with some justification) we didn't want Trident in the first place and it is a bit hypocritical of us to argue the case for a Trident refitting capability at Rosyth. Maybe so. But the real tragedy is the Government's unwillingness to move on the whole question of defence diversification. We have skilled people in their thousands locked into defence work - reliant on Trident, the Eurofighter Project and the rest.

Michael Mates MP RIP

We also heard at Prime Minister's Questions today that the Hon and Gallant Member, Lieutenant Colonel Michael Mates MP, has at last done the honourable thing and resigned from the Government. We could do with a few more of them falling on their swords. Still, we are making progress and every one that bites the dust is a triumph of sorts. Asil Nadir, of course, is still to speak out and who knows what kind of beans he will spill. We shall be having another debate on Monday evening on the reports of the Select Committee on Members' Interests and on Parliamentary Lobbying so we could be having another lively time. For far too long the Tories have managed to get away with murder by suggesting there is something squalid and unsavoury about Labour's connection with the trade unions. It is all above board and plain for all to see with published audited accounts. Compare and contrast this (as the teachers say) with the murky world in which the Tories move.

Listening to Women

On now to more positive topics. Tomorrow, I shall be spending a day with a local woman as part of the "Listening to Women" initiative I spoke about briefly at the last GC. Mo Mowlam MP and Mark Fisher MP came up with the idea of doing this and publishing the results (with guarantees of confidentiality). There are thirty Labour MPs spending the day with women from all kinds of occupations and backgrounds. The idea is to hear their views on things such as work and childcare, health care, education, safety. What changes would make their life better? Are they optimistic about change and improvement? What confidence do they have in institutions such as Councils, Government, the unions, to effect change? It sounds interesting, but I've no idea how it will go in practice. We shall see.

I'm also working on getting Helen Sharman - Britain's first spacewoman - to come to Pendle and visit a local school, so can I ask any school governors who wish to follow this up, to get in touch with me.

Boundary Commissions

On the Party Organisation side there are some big issues coming up. Every Party Member should have received my note on the Parliamentary Boundary Commission. It really is vital we respond and put in masses of submissions. These needn't be academic treatises (better if they're not) but should be letters from the heart, making simple and straightforward points along the lines of those I set out in the note. Anyone willing to help, but who wants to speak to someone before putting pen to paper should get in touch with the office. I've spoken to Nigel Evans about the proposal to transfer the three Ribble Valley wards to Pendle. He doesn't want to lose them any more than we want to get them.

There is also the Local Government Commission beavering away, producing all sorts of weird proposals for re-structuring local government and they will be with us in September. I see Pendle Council is already doing the business and raising local awareness with its "Keep Pendle Local" campaign and that must be good. We need to make sure we are all singing from the same hymn sheet.

Campaigning with John Battle MP

On Sunday, there is the "Campaign Workshop" (for want of a better title) with the Leeds MP John Battle. John is good value for money and I hope we get a good turnout. It starts at 11am at 33, Carr Road, and, hopefully, should be finished by 1pm. So, no-one is losing their Sunday - completely.

On Monday I shall be visiting Cleveland Guest again and after that, Gibfield School which is having an open day. On Tuesday, there is a pensioners' lobby at Westminster so I shall be knocking out some press releases next week with the pensioner in mind. And at the end of next week there is an important meeting in Burnley on the assisted areas map. It involves all the NE Lancs councils and MPs. As you know, Pendle is bidding for Assisted Areas Status and we are up against "depressed areas" in the South of England such as Folkestone. This really does take the biscuit.

Gordon Prentice MP
Thursday 24 June 93

Report to Pendle GC: 28 May 1993

Yesterday was a momentous day. The Palace of Westminster was absolutely crawling with Tory MPs anxious to know the fate of Lamont and who would be brought into the Cabinet. They were also totally hyped up about the knock on effects in case there was a new job in it for them! In practice, very little has changed. This evening Major was saying in Paris that the policies won't change and that Lamont's head was served up on a plate for no other reason than to "freshen up" the Government. Today, it looks as lacklustre as ever and the problems are still there. They won't go away.

At last month's GC I spoke about the ballooning £50 billion deficit and we are now beginning to see in the Press the kind of action the Government will have to take to bring it down. There will be deep cuts in the welfare state and, very probably, further tax increases too. The Tories seem to be working hard to alienate most of their traditional support. The pensioners are up in arms about VAT on fuel and the threat to the post office network. The chemists are fuming. And motorists are facing the prospect of paying for the privilege of driving on the nation's motorways. I am convinced we can deal the Tory Government a mortal blow from which it will never recover. The Tories win elections (or used to) because they were perceived as being more competent than Labour to run the economy. That claim has flown out the window along with all the broken manifesto promises. We have the additional bonus of John Major who is increasingly seen as being completely useless. We must be on our guard next year in case the Tories dump him as they dumped his predecessor.

Apart from the reshuffle, the political world has been buzzing. The Maastricht Bill has finally left the Commons and now goes into the Lords. The official Party line was to abstain on the third reading vote. I voted against (along with another 64 Labour MPs) and will no doubt suffer the consequences in due course. The Bill still does not include the Social Chapter and, in any case, nearly everyone now recognises that economic and monetary union is about as likely to happen as the arrival in Colne of little green men and women from Mars.

The Railways Bill has now left the Commons but it will return to haunt the Tories. It really is a Poll Tax on wheels this one. Iraqgate is bubbling and frothing away nicely with lots more juicy revelations to come. The sight of the Northern Ireland Secretary (

and former Attorney General) Sir Patrick Mayhew and the former Vice Chair of the Tory Party, Sir Hal Miller having difficulties remembering what exactly was said on the arms sales issue is a sight to behold. It is an incontestable fact that one of them is a liar.

Looking back, May was an important month. We had the County Council elections and we held our own in Pendle although we had hopes of doing better. There was a straight switch of votes from the Tories to the LibDems. I know the CLP is organising a forum to discuss campaigning in its widest sense and this kind of initiative has my full support. Also in May I had the privilege of meeting personally Nelson Mandella and the Dalai Lama.

Looking forward, I am involved in the new Target 96 Group of Labour MPs who want to get stuck into Tory marginals and help turn them into Labour seats after the next General Election. I am also involved in a "Listening to Women" project which, hopefully, will result in a paperback. And, next Saturday, I shall be serving behind the counter at the Oxfam shop in Scotland Road, Nelson.

Coming up we have the review of the assisted areas, the report on Lancashire of the Parliamentary Boundary Commission (17 June) and the important review of local government in North Yorkshire (on 21 June).

On internal Party matters, we have two crucially important issues coming up. The first is trade union links (the scrapping of the 12 month rule and membership more generally) and the second, the Plant Report on electoral reform. I hope we will have a good wide ranging debate on both.

Gordon Prentice MP
Friday, 28 May 1993

Report to Pendle GC:30 April 1993

This will be a short report as I am off to see a housebound constituent in twenty minutes and then on to do some canvassing in Barnoldswick. I spend Tuesday of this week - from dawn to dusk - acting as "minder" for our candidate in the Newbury by election. It is very difficult territory for Labour. It is a prosperous market town but the unemployment rate there is not so very different from ours here in Pendle.

The most difficult question to handle on the doorstep is why anyone should vote Labour when no-one seriously thinks we can win. I tell people to vote for what they believe in and if they want to send a Liberal Democrat to Parliament they do so in the full knowledge that when the chips are down they (the Lib Dems) bale out the Tories. Newbury used to have a big Labour vote but it was progressively eaten away by the Lib Dems and only sustained activity over a period can build it up again.

In Pendle we can beat the Lib Dems but we've got to work at it. In the press; out on the streets; with newsletters and leaflets; shaping and leading local opinion and not simply reacting. We can do well in the forthcoming County elections but we've got to do the business between now and next Thursday. We also owe it to the candidates to pitch in and help them get elected.

I shall be in Pendle over the Bank holiday weekend but I shall have to return to Westminster for the important Commons Report Stage of the Maastricht Bill which comes back on the floor of the House on Tuesday and Wednesday of next week. The Party will be re-tabling Amendment 27 on the Social Chapter and everything depends on the Speaker exercising her discretion and allowing a vote on this controversial clause. On Thursday I shall be back here for polling day.

As always, I am kept busy. Yesterday, I had a meeting with Richard Dykes, Managing Director of Post Office Counters, about the Government's privatisation proposals (I think now shelved until the 95/6 Parliamentary session) and the threat to thousands of sub post offices from the proposal to pay benefits by automatic credit transfer into bank accounts of claimants (25% currently don't have bank accounts) rather than across the counter at the local post office. Earlier in the week, I met the top brass at National Power about the coal review, orimulsion and the local

power station at Padiham. At Westminster, there has been a number of lobbies including one from Rolls Royce.

After Maastricht next week, we return to the Budget and the Finance Bill with three days of debate on the floor before the Bill disappears into Committee. Then, on 14 May, Ray Powell's Shops Bill comes back into the limelight. We can also expect a Government announcement on the new Assisted Areas map. The work has been done but results held over until the County elections were out of the way.

Later this month, I shall be meeting (together with East Lancs MPs and Council Leaders) Clive Wilkinson from the Local Government Commission and hopefully we will get some kind of indication of the Commission's thinking.

On the international front, the war in Bosnia drags on with appalling carnage and slaughter. There are no easy answers but the international community cannot close our eyes to what is happening.

One final point. We learnt from the Press this week that the Tory Party gets £7m from anonymous foreign sources. When challenged in the Commons about this, the only thing Major could say in mitigation was that the entire Shadow Cabinet was sponsored by trade unions. At £500 for each Constituency Party that amounts to about £10,000 in total - and its public knowledge. Compare that with the £7M from non tax paying foreigners and assorted fascists.

Go to go now.

Gordon Prentice MP
Friday, 30 April 1993

Report to Pendle GC: 26 March 1993

I am writing this on Thursday afternoon after the slog of the all night sitting on Maastricht and just after Heseltine's statement on the coal review. I take both in turn.

On Maastricht we have now reached the key amendments relating to economic policy - the central bank and so on. True to form, the Liberal Democrats are throwing the Government a lifeline - as they did during the Maastricht Paving debate when the Government scraped home by 318 votes to 315. Every time they complain about Major we remind the LibDems who saved him.

The coal review is an absolute disaster. Dick Caborn - who chaired the Trade and Industry Select Committee - predicts that all 31 pits will be closed within 3 to 4 years. After all the months spent working on his White Paper, Heseltine has completely failed to identify new markets for coal - it is still 160m tonnes over the next five years. We have the debate on the coal review on Monday and we wait to see what the public - and trade union reaction is to the Government proposals.

Tomorrow, Friday, I shall be visiting Baxter Healthcare again to meet their new managing director and to find out why the company is transferring work to Malta and laying people off here. On Tuesday of next week I shall be seeing the Rolls Royce management at the company's HQ in London and I predict a stormy meeting.

Things are appallingly bleak on the jobs front but one of the most difficult things to take are the smug and self satisfied expressions of the Tory MPs on the benches opposite. Winston Churchill and those like him are a complete washout. It only takes twelve of these spineless Tories to vote with the combined Opposition to save the pits. However, there is more chance seeing pigs fly.

On Tuesday of next week, we are back to Maastricht; on Wednesday the changes to legal aid and the Common Agricultural Policy and on Thursday and Friday adjournment debates. In the run up to the County Council elections I shall be spending as much time here as I can, canvassing with our candidates and generally meeting as many voters as I can.

We have a real chance here in Pendle to capitalise on the Government's unpopularity but we need to take the Liberals head

on. Spare no quarter must be the message. Where they are in control their record doesn't bear scrutiny. Tower Hamlets in London is totally corrupt and the Liberal Democrat councillors among the most reactionary in the country. In the Isle of Wight, levels of services are incredibly low. There is hardly another county with a poorer record on nursery provision. And, of course, at Westminster the Liberal Democrats are Major's poodles.

Politics is a rollercoaster with events constantly being overtaken by new developments. The Budget debate - which only finished on Monday - seems light years away but its consequences will be with us for years. This was the Budget in which the Tories hiked taxes massively and the one where they loaded VAT on fuel. The broken promises on tax - made only 11 months ago in the General Election - are now etched deep in the public memory.

Another significant vote in the Commons this week concerned the Trade Union Ballots (Revocation) Regulations. When the Government took powers to force unions to have postal ballots the unions could claim the cost back - but no longer. The ballots are now compulsory but unions will have to bear the costs themselves. We heard so much from the Tories on Tuesday about making the unions open and democratic yet they steadfastly refuse to publish their own accounts.

Rodney Bickerstaffe reminded us last Friday that the Conservative Party received £17m in donations in the year prior to the General Election yet we don't know where it came from. The Guardian revealed earlier this month that some of this money was given by foreign businesspeople who claimed non domicile tax status and were therefore exempt from UK tax. Open the lid of the Tory Party and there's a can of worms.

Locally, I think we are still getting a fairly good press although it could always be better. As always, if you have anything you want me to follow up then let me or Tim or Helen know and we'll get to work on it. If we don't generate news, you can bet the Liberals will invent their own and get some of it published. This time, we have a real chance to damage the Liberals and we've got to go for it!

Gordon Prentice MP
Thursday, 25 March 1993

Report to GC: 29 January 1993

This is a very short Parliamentary Report - because I am very pressed for time and not because there is nothing to say.

The news that has overshadowed everything else was, of course, the Smith and Nephew job losses. I shall want to say a word about this and our response. I met the management within 48 hours of the announcement and once I have received a reply from Heseltine to my letter I shall be seeking a meeting with him. I am also pressing for a full scale debate on the textile industry.

The Commons is cluttered up with lots of controversial Bills. Maastricht grinds on. But we have also had the Powell Bill on Sunday trading, the Lottery Bill and, today, the second reading of Clive Soley's Freedom and Responsibility of the Press Bill which, if carried into law, will oblige newspapers to correct inaccuracies. We have also seen the publication of the Trade and Industry Committee's report on the pit closure programme. It is a long and detailed report and - because it is unanimous - the Government will find it hard to ignore. Undoubtedly, many pits will be saved from closure.

Next Tuesday the House will be considering the Railways Bill which will privatise British Rail, Tyne and Wear Metro, London Underground and various other undertakings. On Wednesday the Government will push through the Revenue Support Grant Settlement which determines how much money Pendle and the County Council will get from Central Government - and how much they can spend without getting capped.

Other than that I have been welcoming Pendle students to Westminster - as well as an intrepid bunch who braved the East Lewisham CLP's Burn's Night. It was fun.

On the casework side, the problems come rolling in relentlessly. There are two cases in particular that I have got my teeth into. One is the Afzal murder (and I saw the Pakistan High Commissioner a couple of days ago with the dead man's widow and brother) and the other is the scandalous injustice of the 22 year long jailing of Anthony Alexandrowicz. On both, I shall be plugging away until I get a result.

Gordon Prentice MP
29 January 1993

textile job losses

Public only 30K ↑. rain cap level
1K none in SSA.

RSC
H7 on Council
Tax Bill.

Year	Lancashire	North West Region
1979	2,061	5,124
1980	8,976	19,164
1981	2,630	9,003
1982	1,729	4,803
1983	782	2,837
1984	199	1,490
1985	26	1,134
1986	48	1,318
1987	231	952
1988	184	1,400
1989	938	1,959
1990	391	2,764
1991	942	2,482

restructured
goods
- all losses
in turn over

S+N. - not Heretford - 40% input from EC
- no level playing field.
- export of manufacturing jobs. - ~~is~~

Bundy Touch / batteries

Press Bill - insurance only not privacy
not balance.

not to protect
the rich + powerful

Compare with regulated electronic media

- can't a gate - early. + Reg'n.

- Coal review

North West
unions
↑ Copeland D.C.
Nicolet Coal - deepest
120° Thompson - mountains

Report to Pendle GC- 27 November 92

I spent a very interesting afternoon today with the Rural Development Commission people visiting various projects in Earby and Barnoldswick that have been grant aided by the Commission (and helped also by Pendle Council). It got me thinking about the special problems of the rural parts of Pendle where deprivation is less visible than in urban areas. We ended up with a short discussion with Gillian Jones, the Council's Tourism Development Officer, who was a fount of knowledge about all things connected with tourism.

The world outside Pendle has changed tremendously in the month since the last GC. We now have a Democrat US president elect and that is bound to make a difference. Here at home, Windsor Castle was partly gutted and the Queen said she would "volunteer" to pay tax. I just about fell off my green bench! Still, as with everything, the answer is in the small print and I wait to see the memorandum of agreement between the Palace, the Treasury and the Revenue which is to be made available in the new year. Incidentally, I've had quite a few letters about the Windsor fire - all, without exception, saying the monarch should pay something towards the restoration.

(And talking of letters, I am getting more and more concerned about the run of racist letters in our local papers. This week, for heaven's sake, they are publishing stuff from the British National Party. I think this correspondence has run its course.)

The Chancellor's Debt Overhang

We have also had the publication of the School Exam League tables which were shot through with inaccuracies and the Autumn Statement which is the latest attempt to get the country out of recession. We have now been in recession with output falling for two years three months. The measures announced will do something but are not sufficient to lift the economy out of the doldrums. Too many people are still struggling with houses they can't sell; jobs that are insecure and debts. The Chancellor talks about the "debt overhang" holding back recovery. He can set an example by paying off his Access bill. The Autumn Statement holds public sector workers to a 1.5% pay increase and allows councils to spend their future capital receipts from the sale of assets. The problem is that in a recession no-one wants to buy Council assets.

We have also had the RSG announcement which is tough on local authorities. Elsewhere, we have witnessed the scandal of the Matrix Churchill affair and the attempt by Government ministers to prevent information getting out which would have shown them to be out and out hypocrites, prepared to see innocent men go to jail. John Major - the man who let everyone know about his safe haven for the Kurds - had turned a blind eye to arms sales to Iraq. What a state of affairs!

Some things, however, have not changed. We still have the conflict raging in the former Yugoslavia with two million displaced people trying to get to places of safety. We are seeing the biggest movement of people within Europe since the war - and the world community is not doing enough to help. The Government here turned back 183 refugees seeking sanctuary.

Major as PM: two years old this week

This week, of course, is also the second anniversary of John Major becoming Prime Minister. And what a glowing record he has! The Government's economic policy blown to smithereens; business failures at record levels; unemployment still rising for the thirtieth successive month; output still falling; repossessions still at record levels and we are getting more of the same. This month's medicine is the pay policy; the abolition of the wages councils and the lost entitlement to legal aid for 7 million people.

At Westminster on Tuesday, we shall be starting the Committee stage of the Maastricht Bill - which will go on for months. In the new year we shall have the report on the pit closures. We must keep the issue in the public mind - as the Party did so successfully with the march and rally in Nelson.

Gordon Prentice MP

Friday 27.11.92

parliamentary report

A bi-monthly report back from Gordon Prentice
MP to Pendle Labour Party Members

October 1992.

Support the miners!

I am writing this on Saturday 24 October having spent the morning collecting signatures for our "Coal not Dole" petition. Despite the rain - which was lashing down - we got a tremendous response from people who were queuing up to sign. My thanks go to all the Party members who are helping to collect names for the Pendle petition and, especially, to the hundreds of people who have written to me to express their outrage at what is happening.

I have never had so many avowed Tories write to me to tell me how much they now regret voting Conservative at the General Election on 9 April. Well, they may have an opportunity - sooner than expected - to redeem themselves.

The plain fact is that the Major Government is on the ropes. Discredited. Humiliated as a result of countless U turns. And completely directionless.

First came the cataclysmic events of 16 September when the Government threw a billion pounds at the speculators - trying vainly to defend the £ at DM2.95 - an unsustainable position. The end result was devaluation.

A strong currency can only be the product of a strong economy and for the past 13 years the Tories have been dismantling ours. Our manufacturing industry is a mere shadow of what it once was and the chickens are now coming home to roost.

Second, came the spectacular (but partial) U turn on the miners. Instead of immediate closure and no review we now have a review of 21 pits and the promise of a white paper on the Government's "energy policy". However, 10 pits are outside the review and they have

Advice Surgeries are held on the first and third Saturdays of the month. "Roving" surgeries are held on Fridays. For details phone the Office on 695471.

already been written off by the Government. Our task is to mobilise public opinion and the feeling of outrage and keep the pressure on the Tories.

The third "weak spot" is Maastricht. John Major has nailed his colours to the mast on this one - but he can only get the Maastricht Bill through the House of Commons if he has Labour support or, at the very least, Labour acquiescence.

We must vote against Maastricht - not because we are anti Europe or because we want to pull out of the European Community (and we don't) - but because this provides an opportunity to bring down Major and even, perhaps, this appalling Tory Government. If we shirk from this task people will never forgive us. And we have good, solid, socialist reasons for voting against! John Major's vision of Europe is not ours. Instead of looking over our shoulders all the time, we should speak out and set our own agenda. People are crying out for a lead - and we should give it!

Broken promises...

It is now clear to everyone in Pendle that just about every central Tory election promise has been broken - promises of a post-election end to recession, an end to repossession, promises for detailed improvements in our public services, action for the unemployed, action on training (especially for school leavers) and even year-on-year tax cuts. Here are the first broken promises of the new Parliament.

•The Broken Promises on repossession

The Government has failed to curb repossession despite a specific promise before the election. Major told listeners of BBC Radio 4's Desert Island Discs: "**We took action which has stopped most of the repossession**"

Norman Lamont was confident the housing recovery measures he was introducing would "prevent about 40,000 repossession". In fact, only 40 homes have been saved from repossession by the homeowners rescue scheme. 300,000 families are now more than six months in mortgage arrears.

•The Broken Promise to Young People

Before the election, Ministers promised the unemployed would receive proper training with the

Government guaranteeing a place on Youth Training for all young people aged 16-17 years not in fulltime education or training and who do not have a job. Now hundreds of school leavers have neither a job nor a place on a scheme, nor even benefit.

•The Broken Promise to Train the Unemployed

During the election, Ministers denied there were cuts on the way. Gillian Shepherd, the Employment Minister, said "we have increased the funding available for Youth Training this very year". She has now announced cuts in the budget.

•The Broken Promise on Public Services

Before and during the election Major and Lamont added commitments to the Government's spending programme. £16 billion has now been cut from the public spending totals that had been agreed.

•The Broken Promise on Tax

At the election Major promised tax cuts: **"I think it is probable that this can be done year on year"**. He went on to say: **"I have no doubt that we will be able to make further reductions in the rate of taxation but perhaps not at the rate of a penny per year but we will be able to make reductions at a smaller rate"**. Now all talk of tax cuts has gone out of the window.

•The Broken Promise on Devaluation

Major called devaluation "the soft option ... a betrayal of Britain's future. (It would) cause rising inflation ... lose markets, competitiveness, jobs and prosperity". He said: **"As the Chancellor has made crystal clear there is going to be no devaluation, no realignment."**

And Lamont said: **"There is going to be no devaluation, no leaving the ERM. We are absolutely committed to the ERM. It is at the centre of our policy. We are going to maintain sterling's parity and we will do whatever is necessary and I hope there is no room for any doubt about that at all."** They devalued.

•The Broken Promise on Europe and the Exchange Rate Mechanism

When Norman Lamont was asked if there were any circumstances in which he would consider leaving the ERM he replied: **"No ... as I've said devaluation is fool's gold."** For John Major the ERM was: **"At the very centre of our anti-inflation strategy. There is a very real risk that were we to leave the ERM the net result would be that interest rates would rise rather than fall"**. The

• The Broken Promise of Recovery

The Government promised that election victory would bring a recovery of confidence, as sure as night follows day. Lamont said: **"The vital key to unlock recovery is ... the confidence that only a Conservative Government can bring."**

Major said: **"All that Britain is waiting for to achieve recovery is the confidence a Conservative Government will bring. Vote Conservative on Thursday and the recovery will continue on Friday."**

Michael Heseltine topped it with this one: **"You can trust the Tories ... the only kick start that will work will be the confidence created by the election of a Conservative Government on 9th April."**

If a General Election were held today there is not the remotest possibility of the Tories getting back in. They won the election on the back of lies, smears and fabrications - and people have now woken up to that fact. Indeed, the agony isn't over. On 12 November the Chancellor of the Exchequer will unveil the Autumn Statement which will outline the Government's spending plans for the year ahead. There will be deep cuts in public spending, even perhaps a pay freeze for people working in the public sector.

Our task is to hammer home the real facts about the Tories and how they lied their way back into power on 9 April. We must work for an early General Election.

Out and about...Out and

Over the past few weeks I've visited Edge End, Mansfield and Walton High School and I intend to get around as many primary schools as I can over the coming months. If you think of somewhere I should visit just give the office a ring and let me know.

The "roving surgeries" I spoke about in my August letter are now up and running. The first was in Earby and another - at Vivary Bridge - is coming up. Then we plan to do Laneshawbridge. The strategy is to target small areas well away from the places where I hold my regular calendared surgeries.

Next report back: Maastricht

REPORT TO G.C. - 30TH OCTOBER 1992

This has been a momentous month. The Government has been coming apart at the seams under the pressure of events and we shall have to see whether they survive the big test next Wednesday in the Maastricht Paving Debate. (more about this later.)

Yesterday, I met John Boardman and others from the Pendle area at Westminster during the big Aerospace lobby. The industry is now in a critical condition with British Aerospace and Rolls Royce shedding 39,000 jobs in the last 5 years. The Unions are pressing hard for the EFA - not because they want to be heavily dependent on defence related projects - but because it is the only work available and without it, 40,000 more jobs would be lost and the North West's skills base would be permanently damaged. We wait to see whether the Government will press ahead with the EFA even if the other partners in consortium pull out. The Party's official line is to back the project to safeguard skills and preserve jobs. It is one of the few areas in British industry where "leading edge" technologies are being developed.

We also saw, last weekend, the gigantic March for the miners in London. I cannot remember being on a March quite as big - at least not since the early 1980s. We must keep the miners and what is happening to the coal industry in the public eye and I shall be working hard to do this locally with the help of the Party. The Party, I think, will be adopting a pit as it did in the Miners' Strike and there is also the forthcoming local March & Rally which Sally has spoken to me about.

I feel as if the political ground is shaking under our feet. We had a very real chance of getting rid of Major next Wednesday on the Maastricht vote and while Labour will be voting against the Government, Major has probably been saved by a coalition of the Liberal Democrats (bailing out the Tories again) and a motley collection of spineless Tory rebels who say things one week and change their minds the next. I cannot understand why the Liberal Democrats should be throwing Major this lifeline, because he has made next Wednesday's vote an issue of confidence in him. It has got nothing to do with the merits of Maastricht.

As far as we are concerned, we must do everything we can to destabilise the Government and there will be plenty of opportunities, no matter how the vote goes next Wednesday. On the 12th November we will get the Autumn statement, which will probably herald a public sector pay freeze and swingeing cuts throughout the public sector. It is rumoured that certain capital projects will be protected, but we will have to wait and see. I suspect that areas such as road building will face the axe, along with more obvious candidates such as housing and education.

Things are now extremely busy at Westminster and we are having three line whips every night next week. There is the Asylum Bill on Monday, followed by the new Housing Bill and then Maastricht, and a week on Monday, the new Education Bill implementing the White Paper "Choice & Diversity".

OUT AND ABOUT

I have spent the afternoon today at Park High School and had a welcome opportunity to speak to the Head, in the wake of the opt-out vote. The result was splendid and is a tribute to all those in the Party (and beyond) who worked so hard to get this result. This evening I shall be dropping in at the Halloween Disco at Laneshawbridge Primary School.

I have now got three school groups coming down to Westminster over the next few months and if you have contacts in schools who would like to do this, then let the office know.

My surgeries are going quite well now - with the number of people turning up increasing month by month, and we are now doing roving surgeries to get to more out of the way places. Tim and I are making plans to host Saturday Coffee Mornings in estates across the constituency, where I will say a few words about the general political situation and give people the opportunity to have a chat.

GORDON PRENTICE MP
30.10.92.

Report to Pendle GC: 25 September 92

This will, of necessity, be a short report. It has been a week of high drama. Earlier today in the Commons, I heard the resignation statement from David Mellor. He admitted he was the architect of his own misfortune - but he did not accept it was wrong to accept freebie holidays from people. Indeed, earlier in the week the Prime Minister had confirmed that Mellor had not broken the ministerial guidelines by accepting an all expenses paid holiday and lavish hospitality from Mrs Mona Bauwens. Freebies are OK, apparently. They are not. And it was this rather than the much publicised association with the actress that forced his resignation.

Of course, it was Major and Lamont (and the rest of the Tory Government) who should have resigned this week. They did a comprehensive U turn in policy - repudiating everything they have said over the past two years. They have left the economy at death's door.

I have reproduced a series of table's from yesterday's Financial Times which show how the economy has moved since John Major became Prime Minister in November 1990. Industrial production down. Manufacturing output down. Engineering orders down. Retail trade stagnant. Unemployed up by over a million. In all the major industrial sectors, output is down. In some cases, such as textiles, massively down. The country is making less and importing more - an unsustainable position in the long term.

It was for this reason that the £ collapsed. The "real economy" - the goods that are made and traded and the jobs and skills of our people - was allowed to weaken and decay. The end result is a devaluation of the currency and a policy U turn on a breathtaking scale.

I shall say a word or two about Maastricht at the GC (and the NEC statement is attached for information) but my position is essentially this. The Maastricht Treaty is dead in the water. It proposed a move towards a single currency with the member currencies moving closer together before being locked together. The UK is now out of the ERM (the precursor to the single currency) and the Government will not say whether it will rejoin. A single currency must involve the convergence of the economies of the member states - on growth, employment and so on and not just inflation levels. The events of the last week show that the UK

economy was in such a weak state it was not credible to suggest that its performance would converge with the stronger European economies. Inflation levels cannot be the only criteria for convergence. What the Government was offering the people of Britain with its Maastricht Treaty was a **Banker's Europe** with price stability as the only goal - and not a **Citizen's Europe** based on growing prosperity for all member countries. A Banker's Europe is a deflationary Europe where jobs are lost, industries go under and skills are lost.

The UK version of Maastricht was not even the one considered by the other Community countries! Major's version was stripped of the Social Chapter which promised benefits to working people throughout the Community. When I was asked about my attitude to Maastricht at the July GC I said that I would wait to see what would happen in October when the Bill would be brought back to the Commons. Well, the world has been turned upside down since July and Maastricht as it now stands is as dead as the proverbial parrot. We now need a real debate within the Party and outside on the kind of Europe we want.

The M65

Earlier this week, the Government at long last released the findings of the Transpennine Road Study. They are proposing a dual carriageway (and not a motorway) on the route from the M65 at Colne to Skipton - and not along the previously indicated route. The Government wants comments by 5 March 1993 and this gives the Party plenty of time to take a considered view of the proposal.

Out and About

Unfortunately, because of the three line whip in the Commons today, I had to cancel my planned visit to Rolls Royce in Barnoldswick. This will be speedily re-scheduled. Over the past few weeks I've visited Primet High and Nelson and Colne College. I had an interesting visit to The Limes - a home for mentally ill people run by the voluntary group, Making Space. My thanks go to all the people who set these up. I have also been into the lion's den - the head office of UK Waste in Chiswick, London to discuss their plans for turning Moor Isles Farm into a rubbish tip. Nothing I heard persuaded me that this is anything other than a totally unsupportable proposal. I shall want to raise the Moor Isles issue in the Commons at an appropriate time.

Gordon Prentice MP
25.9.92

Meltdown
on Wed

parliamentary report

A bi-monthly report back from Gordon Prentice
MP to Pendle Labour Party Members

August 1992.

News from Westminster...

Well, Parliament has packed up for the recess but the MP's work goes on! It is a common misconception in the world outside that when Parliament isn't sitting MPs are to be found lazing on Mediterranean beaches.

However, the recess is when a lot of spade work is done. There are some projects I want to complete over the summer on subjects as diverse as the Duchy of Lancaster and the organisation and procedures of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

As you know, the PLP decided just before the recess to carry out another review of its procedures in the wake of the ructions over Maastricht. The Tribune Group has elected a small team to produce evidence and I am one of its members. This may seem a very dry and arcane subject but how the PLP goes about organising itself will be of key importance in the months ahead.

We need to have good, constructive debate within the Party so that when important decisions are made in the months ahead we can express our views openly and confidently and then rally behind the decision the Party eventually takes.

Maastricht is likely to be very controversial. How far do we go down the road towards a European Union? Do we want and do we need a common currency? Is there an alternative? And how do we ensure that there is real political accountability in a Community of 12 states?

When Parliament reassembles in October we will be pitched into debates on Maastricht and other vital policy areas and I am sure the Pendle Party's excellent "All members' Newsletter" will be an important vehicle in

MP's Advice Surgeries are held across the constituency on the first and third Saturdays of the month. Check local press for details or phone the Office on 695471.

stimulating discussion. The newsletter is a marvellous initiative and everyone involved in putting it together deserves a pat on the back.

And, talking of new ventures and new developments, I should say a few words about our outgoing Party Officers, John Boardman, Jim Dodd and Roger Brown. Each of them has made a tremendous contribution to the life of the Pendle CLP over many years and while they have decided to stand down from office in the CLP they still have much to offer. I will be looking forward to working with them in whatever capacity they choose to help the Pendle Party in the future.

Since my last all members' letter we have had a change in the Party leadership and we also have a changed line up in the Shadow Cabinet. I am certain the new faces will give the Party in Parliament a freshness and a new zip and energy which will help us win the arguments with the Tories - and with the general public.

Keeping in touch

I shall be away on holiday for a couple of weeks at the end of August and beginning of September but I shall be dropping in to visit a few more local firms and organisations before I go. I am writing this before the Pendleside By Election which was triggered by the bankruptcy of the Tory incumbent. I am sure our excellent candidate Charlie Atkinson will keep the flag flying in what is difficult territory for Labour. Later this month I shall be visiting Baxter Healthcare, Pendle Enterprise Trust, the local Citizens' Advice Bureau and so on.

So, if you think of any organisations or firms who would welcome a visit and a chat from their local MP, then let me know. This is a standing invitation!

I am also keen to get around the Party branches and affiliates although this is next to impossible when Parliament is sitting. Helen Ingham keeps my diary at 33 Carr Road if you want to know my availability.

There is also the wider question of keeping in touch with local people and while my surgeries do help there are some areas of the constituency where the "take up" (for want of a better word) is lower than expected. I shall be looking at running additional surgeries on the first and third Fridays of the month as a way of reaching more people. In the longer term, I'd like to look at the possibility of running mobile surgeries in the more rural parts of Pendle.

Tory Training Cuts

The North West economy needs a shot in the arm. Too many of our industries are in decline and we have too little training - and not just for young people but for everyone.

The North West, as with the rest of Britain, is suffering from a severe training gap. Instead of investing in people to help them gain skills the Tories are cutting funds for training. These are the figures in real terms (£m)

Year	89/90	91/2	92/3
Training Budget	2,585	1,719	1,549
Youth Training	1,163	859	814
ET	1,284	832	772

These cuts could be followed by even more drastic reductions this year as Government borrowing has spiralled out of control. The Tories have got the cheek of the devil to suggest that Labour couldn't run the economy. On the evidence of the official figures, the Tories couldn't run a wheel stall.

The Tory cuts are devastating training provision. Most glaringly, Youth Training is falling apart, particularly the guarantee of a place for every 16 - 17 year old who wants one. Three reports recently have highlighted the fact that tens of thousands of young people are on waiting lists for youth training.

Employment Action, the Government's scheme to help unemployed people is a failure. Launched in June 91, there should have been 30,000 people on the scheme by now. Instead there are 17,000.

The nightmare we warned about - deteriorating government finances and rising unemployment in a fourth term Tory Government - is now a reality. Unemployment currently stands at 2.7 million with 23 unemployed people chasing every registered vacancy.

Money down the drain

Ever since my selection as Pendle's Parliamentary Candidate in October 1990, I've been waging a campaign against the privatised utilities.

Norweb has been ripping people off right, left and centre but the water companies are almost as bad.

Since privatisation, the average water bill has increased by 47.1%. Water charges have risen by almost three times the rate of inflation. Back in January 1989 the present Environment Secretary, Michael Howard, said "any price increase will be modest". In the North West, water charges have skyrocketed by 41% since 1989.

Last year 900,000 court summonses were instigated by water companies to households with water debts. There has been a massive increase in the number of families who have had their water supply turned off. The

water "watchdog" OFWAT reported that 21,000 households have had their water supplies disconnected during 1991/2. That figure represents a staggering 177% increase in the number of disconnections in just one year.

I am always interested to hear about the actions (and inactions) of our privatised utilities so if you hear anything get in touch.

The Recession Bites... and Bites

30,722 businesses collapsed in Britain during the first six months of 1992. Here in the North West there were 1,991 business failures in the first six months of last year. In the same period in 1992 there were 2,440 failures - a staggering increase of 22%.

The state of the economy is now so bad that even the loyal Tory press is beginning to talk aloud about "something having to be done". If only the Tory tabloids had reported the truth during the election campaign rather than the inventions fed to them by Tory Central Office things could have been very different.

Whatever happens now, the British people know who to blame - and its not the Labour Party.

Local Government: the next experiment

As you know, the Tory Government is about to re-draw the local government map of Britain yet again. Over the coming months there will be a lot of debate in the local press about the future of Pendle Council and the other 13 district councils in Lancashire as well as the future of the County Council itself.

There is a very vocal lobby arguing for the return of parts of Pendle to North Yorkshire and I have told them I would listen to their views and concerns. I also point out whenever I get the chance that the Tories are responsible for every post war local government re-organisation and it is they who have messed things up!

But the serious point concerns the levels of service provision. Over the border in North Yorkshire, the standard of many services is quite pitiful. Before any firm decisions are taken by the Tory Government, there should be wide ranging debate inside and outside Parliament - not just about boundaries but about the functions and financing of local councils.

The Poll tax fiasco must never be repeated. But the Tories are slow learners. Their new Council Tax will produce some wierd and wonderful anomalies here in Pendle. Watch this space!

Next report back: Party Conference

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Parliamentary Report to Pendle GC: 31 July 1992

I am writing this first thing on Friday morning, 31 July, and my voice has gone completely. It started to crack on Wednesday evening when I was doing an interview with Radio Lancashire about Norweb's policy of extracting cash from customers for electricity they hadn't yet used! But, from the way I feel now, it looks as if it will be a written report only to this evening's GC.

Parliament, of course, has now gone into recess although this doesn't mean to say that MPs are swanning off on holiday. In fact I've never been busier. The case work continues whether Parliament is sitting or not. There are firms and other organisations within the constituency to visit and people to meet. I also want to use the summer to get the Office at Carr Road up and running and firing on all four cylinders. I have arranged to meet the Party officers before tonight's GC to finalise (I hope) the proposals to purchase the building. The CLP will have its own base and a property it owns.

I have proposed the CLP takes the first floor and attic for its exclusive use and I shall occupy the ground floor with Helen and Tim (the kitchen will be shared) paying rent to the CLP which covers the mortgage repayments. Outgoings such as electricity, water, gas and the rates will, I propose, be split 50:50. The CLP will have its own phone line. The other details will be reported to the GC tonight along with the Executive Committee's recommendations. I hope to have support for the proposal. As I have said before, whatever decision the CLP may take on this I will still need to have a staffed office in the constituency and Carr Road is clearly the obvious place.

The new White Papers

Away from property matters, the Tories are already in deep trouble only three and a half months after the General Election. Their Health White Paper was full of good intentions but promised nothing in the way of further resources. The Education White Paper has been slammed as the start of a slide into chaos. Local Education Authorities such as our own in Lancashire will see their role diminished and changed over time as more and more schools opt out. LEAs are not perfect. They can be slow and bureaucratic. But, when the chips are down, they are subject to democratic control. The Tories say the new structures will take politics out of education. That is absurd as virtually everything we do impacts on other people and therefore has a political dimension. What the Tories really mean is that their structures will remove the opportunity of

political debate and discussion by taking the ultimate powers of decision away from local authorities and giving them to unaccountable quangoes appointed by the Secretary of State.

The European Fighter Aircraft

Elsewhere, the air is still full of controversies. We have the Government's proposals to privatise British Rail and British Coal. I dread to think what will become of North West Regional Railways. The less profitable lines are certain to be under threat. There is also the furore about the European Fighter Aircraft whose future must now hang in the balance after the withdrawal of Germany from the consortium. This is a tricky issue for everyone in the North West. We must preserve the region's skills base and its manufacturing industry but we must also diversify out of arms manufacture. At present, we are locked into defence related work. We cannot tolerate the situation indefinitely where thousands of our most skilled people are making colossally expensive military hardware that no-one wants or needs. The pressure behind arms sales to developing countries comes, at least in part, from the need to recoup the vast costs of developing these military systems. Who needs it?

Moor Isles

Locally, one of the big issues hitting the headlines is the proposal to use Moor Isles Farm as a rubbish tip. I am opposed to this as is Pendle Borough Council and every other sane individual in Pendle. However, I don't know which way the wind is blowing at County Hall in Preston and I shall be doing all I can over the coming few weeks to get the planning application turned down.

Elsewhere we have seen the disturbances across the country and next door in Burnley. Fortunately, things seem to have died down for the moment but the events demonstrate just how fragile our society can be. Just below the surface, there is discontentment and disillusion fed, in many cases, by unemployment. Last week I met council leaders and MPs from across North West at a meeting here in Pendle and we discussed what happened in Burnley without coming to any firm conclusions as to why it happened then and there.

I am pleased to see the CLP members' newsletter is now being produced and I am sure it will survive as a regular feature. I will do all I can to support it. My own Parliamentary Report to all members will also be going out in August.

Gordon Prentice MP

REPORT TO PENDLE G.C. - FRIDAY 26TH JUNE 1992

First, I would like to say how deeply disappointed I was that we failed to win Vivary Bridge yesterday. We had an extremely energetic Candidate in Donald Mitchell, but, despite this, we always knew that Vivary Bridge would be a tough nut to crack. The Liberals have been dug in there for many years and we just have to keep hammering away at them.

Things are still busy for me. I am very fortunate in having Helen Ingham as my secretary who is now working at the office at Carr Rd. It was an immensely difficult job to select someone from a number of very strong local candidates. Helen is a Barrowford Branch member and until recently worked for the A.E.U., so she is supremely well qualified. In August, Tim will also be coming to work with me to help me reach out to parts of the Electorate who traditionally are reluctant to vote for us!

On the question of Carr Rd. more generally, I have explained the latest position to the Party's Executive, who will be reporting in due course to the G.C. I have also had a word with Alan McAnulty about how we could possibly raise funds to purchase the building. At its simplest, the position is this. The Co-op Bank and National Westminster are prepared to lend 60% and 70% respectively of the purchase price, but this would leave us having to raise about £12,000 which obviously will stretch our resources! I have since been in touch with Unity Trust to see if they can improve on this and they will be getting back to me early next week at the Commons. There are other options, but I am determined to pursue to the very end, the option which vests the legal title of Carr Rd. with the Labour Party.

In the Constituency

My regular surgeries across the constituency are picking up, although I have to say I am a bit short of customers in Trawden and Barnoldswick. Perhaps this will change. I am getting a tremendous variety of issues, although the controversy over school admissions is perhaps the most fraught at the present. When the Commons is sitting I try to get out and about in the constituency on Fridays. Last week I met the Police top brass and the week before, met the Chair of Burnley Health Care and the senior management team. Next week I shall be visiting the local Benefits Agency Office at Burnley. In the recess, I shall be spending a lot of my time visiting schools, factories and other places where people meet.

At Westminster

Life is strange at Westminster at the moment. There is a bit of a vacuum in the P.L.P. because of the interregnum between Neil Kinnock and the new leadership. Parliamentary business is fairly light which is astonishing a couple of months after the

Government has won a fresh term of office. Now that Maastricht has been blown out of the water, there is a large hole left in the Government's legislative programme, which it is in no hurry to fill. There is still no sign of the Select Committees, although it is rumoured that these will be reconstituted before the recess.

You will know that Stan Orme is standing down as Chair of the PLP and I have nominated Doug Hoyle to stand for this position. There are five candidates (the others are Gwyneth Dunwoody, Ernie Ross, Alan Rogers & Robin Corbett) There is also a contest for Chief Whip and I shall be voting for John Evans against the incumbent Derek Forster. Derek is an extremely likeable person, but a number of us feel that the PLP could perhaps be whipped more effectively in view of the Government's small majority.

Outside Westminster

As the G.C. knows, I am campaigning for Brian Gould. I did a well attended meeting last week in Crawley, West Sussex, and next Sunday I shall be speaking to the West Lancs CLP in Skelmersdale.

I have already mentioned some of the peculiarities of the P.L.P. and I am currently preparing a paper for the Tribune Group on how the P.L.P. conducts its business and how it fits into the wider Party. When I have finished this, I shall send copies to any Pendle Party Member who is interested in having sight of it.

The Press

I had expected a feature piece in today's Nelson Leader on "A day in the life of Pendle's new MP". Unfortunately, there was no sign of it, but, hopefully, it will appear next week. If not, it is the last time I buy Stuart Draper lunch at the Commons! Elsewhere, there was a useful piece in last week's Sunday Mirror about my campaign to open to public scrutiny the revenues of the Duchy of Lancaster. The Mirror Comment was about this also. In October, Granada TV has asked me to do a piece on "A week in Westminster" commenting on the week's Parliamentary business from a critical view point. I have also featured in Private Eye as New Boy No. 3, and Bridget is New Girl No. 1. According to the Eye, I am from Glasgow, there can be no greater insult for someone born and brought up in Edinburgh!

Finally, I hope to meet many constituents at Westminster over the coming months. Roy Barnes - a teacher at West Craven High School - had a party of 12 students at Westminster yesterday, and I thoroughly enjoyed talking to them about the place and its arcane traditions.

GORDON PRENTICE MP

27 June 1992
(copies to Party Branches)

PARLIAMENTARY REPORT TO THE PENDLE GC 29 MAY1992

Since the last GC I have been preoccupied with various administrative matters which I touched on in my report to all members that went out last week (and this). I now have an office at Westminster. (Direct line to my desk is 071 219 4011). Next door is Harriet Harman and across the corridor is Robin Cook. Other Labour MPs are all around except that two doors away is an extremely large and palatial office belonging to Ted Heath. They had to find a big office for an ex Prime Minister and he ended up next to us.

The big political story of the last few days is, of course, the collapse of Olympia and York who own Canary Wharf. Docklands has been given a tremendous amount of hidden Government subsidy - more, I recollect, than the entire amount given to all the other urban programme authorities in Britain. There will be a considerable amount of fall-out from the O&Y bankruptcy and we wait to see how the Government will bale out the property developers.

I am taking an interest in these matters and next week I shall be attending a meeting of Lloyds of London investors - that is, those who lost a lot of money from the recent catastrophies such as Piper Alpha and want Parliament and the Courts to intervene to protect them. I take the view that the City of London badly needs regulating after all the scandals and bankruptcies of recent years. What we can do on the Labour side is to expose what is happening and be a thorn in the flesh of the establishment - as well as the Government.

That is just one reason why I have put down my name to serve on the Trade and Industry Select Committee. Clearly I have a constituency interest in getting deeply involved in manufacturing industry issues and I hope I am lucky in getting on.

Elsewhere, the main issue of debate and contention is Maastricht and next week the Bill goes into Committee on the floor of the House. There are three line whips most of next week.

The issue of Maastricht raised a lot of questions - certainly within the new intake - about how the PLP decides policy and that is very much a live issue. Essentially, the new Labour intake want more discussion before the policy line is handed down from the Shadow Cabinet. The way in which the PLP operates comes as an amazing shock to the system!

Out and about

Tomorrow I shall be seeing off the Burnley and Pendle Anti Apartheid people who are cycling from Barnoldswick to Blackburn. Next Friday I shall be meeting Burnley Health Care for a general discussion on where they intend to go from here. Peter Pike, Janet Anderson and Greg Pope will also be there.

At Westminster next week, I shall be attending the annual meeting of the NW Group of Labour MPs. On the agenda is a discussion of how we can make the group more effective. It is only slightly smaller than the Scottish Group but - by general consent - wields much less influence within the Parliamentary Party. We need to change that. As part of the battle to tie the Tory Government down, I have decided not to pair with a Tory MP although I have had countless offers!

Finally, I should mention that I have invited Stuart Draper down to Westminster on 9 June to have a look around. Hopefully he will do a feature for the Leader on "a day in the life of Pendle's MP". I am looking forward to it.

Gordon Prentice MP
29 May 1992

REPORT TO PENDLE GC: 24 APRIL 92

(cc Branches and affiliates)

A monthly report back from Gordon Prentice MP No. 14

How does it feel to be an MP? The simple answer is *much the same as before!* But the real answer is that things are very different. First there is the mail. It comes in sackfuls. I am deluged with letters from constituents, from lobbyists, from companies who need help and support, from voluntary organisations, from campaigning groups promoting a million and one causes.

Then there is Westminster itself. Face to face with the real enemy - the Conservative Parliamentary Party. There is a real determination within the PLP to harry the Government, to make life difficult for the Tories and - who knows - precipitate an election earlier than everyone currently anticipates. The Tories only have an overall majority of 21 and that can easily be eroded through by elections.

Despite all the triumphalism of the Tories, they are not in a strong position. Unemployment is set to rise towards three million. On the Government's own figures the economy will grow this year at 1% - a snail's pace after 18 months in which the economy has been contracting. The Tories got us into this recession and it falls on them to get us out of it. Our task must be to campaign more vigorously, fight ever harder to get our message across to the millions of people who - for one reason or another - voted against their own interests by voting Conservative. We can start by working to keep an excellent Labour Council here in Pendle.

Why did we lose?

There are, no doubt, lots of reasons why Labour lost the election. Perhaps our campaign did fall away towards polling day. Perhaps the Tory tax lie (that everyone would have to pay £1,250 more a year) got through. Perhaps the hatchet job that the tabloid press did on Neil Kinnock in the last few days had an impact. Maybe it was the Sheffield Rally that turned people off. Maybe it was Major's last minute appeal (in the last Tory Election Broadcast) to "save the Union". Who knows? What I am absolutely convinced about is that there is no one, single reason. It was probably a combination of factors.

That is why I welcome the opportunity of a wide ranging debate in the Party about the election defeat and the lessons we can learn from it. We all have something to contribute. I am, however, disappointed that the time available for debate has been truncated and that we have been pitchforked into an early leadership election. I understand why Neil felt he had to stand down quickly. The election defeat was a terrible personal blow to him. But my own view is that it would have been better for the Party if the leadership election had been postponed until the October Conference. Roy Hattersley could have acted as Leader pro tem.

The Party Leadership

Still, that is now history and we are faced with making immediate decisions on the Leadership. The nominations (by MPs) have to be lodged by Tuesday of next week and I am minded to nominate Bryan Gould for Leader (and

Deputy Leader). I would feel very relaxed about John Smith as Leader - if it comes to that - but I feel Bryan has a radical outlook, a track record as an ideas person, and an appeal in the south where we need to win votes in 1997. I have also worked closely with him in the past and know him as a good Democratic Socialist.

While the leadership election is supremely important, I am concerned with lots of other more mundane matters. I am arranging the purchase of 33 Carr Road from the TGWU and this will be my Constituency Office. A survey is being done next week to ensure the building is not riddled with dry rot! I have arranged a meeting with the CLP officers a week on Sunday to discuss how we might use the building as a Labour Movement resource. The outcome of our discussions will come back to the GC in due course. I shall also be holding regular fortnightly surgeries across the constituency and these will be advertised prominently in the local press.

Working arrangements.

As the GC knows, I intend to run an office here in the constituency employing a secretary to progress chase, deal with constituency mail, keep my diary and so on. I shall shortly be circulating all Pendle Labour Party members with details of the job specification and I would welcome applications from people who are enthusiastic and keen to do this kind of work. The job will be open to Labour Party members only.

I shall also need an office in Westminster and I am currently working on the logistics of this! As yet, I do not have a desk or a (permanent) phone number. Should you want to reach me at the Commons in the meantime you should dial 071 219 3000 and leave a message for me.

If you need to get in touch with me urgently in London you can always reach me or leave a message at my Lewisham number (081 318 2711). In Pendle you have the Carr Road numbers and my home number in Barlick. It goes without saying that I would be delighted to meet at Westminster (and at home in Lewisham) any member of the Pendle Party who is visiting London.

Parliamentary Business.

Next week the main item of business is the election of the Speaker. I shall report on the ins and outs of this at the GC on Friday night.

GORDON PRENTICE

Pendle Labour Party

Prospective Parliamentary Candidate: Gordon Prentice

Agent: Tim Ormrod

33 Carr Road

NELSON

Lancashire BB9 7JS

Hotline for advice and help 0282 695471

TO ALL MEMBERS OF PENDLE LABOUR PARTY

1 December 1991

Dear Friend

I can hardly believe 1991 is drawing to a close. It has been a busy and an eventful year for me - full of false alarms about the date of the General Election. First we expected a summer election and then a November one. Now the Tories have put back their day of judgement until April or May 1992. Nothing could better illustrate their lack of confidence than this constant dithering over when to go to the country.

But 1991 also had its positive side. We took control of Pendle Council and the Labour Group is working well despite the very difficult financial situation it inherited. The simple truth is that another dose of Tory Government will finish off local government entirely. Its remaining powers will be stripped from it and given to quangoes of one kind or another and people will become increasingly reluctant to stand for election to councils that can't actually do anything.

But it is not going to be like that. A General Election is now only months away and we can now see the finishing tape. And while I am increasingly confident about the result here in Pendle, we should not be complacent. It is not going to drop like a ripe plum on to our lap. We shall have to work for it.

First, we've got to get our policies right. We've got to know which issues to stress and what to say. We'll be campaigning on the health service (the local hospitals have been given the go ahead by the Tories to opt out in April 1992); the local economy and jobs; privatisation; the poll tax and its replacement.

Campaign themes.

The fact is the Tories are the high tax Party although they will spend the entire election campaign trying to persuade people we would tax them out of existence. This is sheer nonsense. No one earning less than £21,000 (88% of the population) will pay more in tax under Labour. We will increase the number of tax bands to make sure that people pay their fair share. And we'll use the money to increase child benefit and pensions by £5 a week for a single pensioner and £8 for a couple. That is the trade off.

The Tories have proved themselves congenitally incapable of



devising a fair tax system. The Poll Tax is the most unfair tax ever invented and the new Council tax is not much better. Under that tax - which the Tories want to introduce in April 1993 - the richest person in the City of Westminster will, on the Government's own figures, pay less than the poorest person in Pendle! Can you believe it? And then there is VAT. Hiked up to 17.5% to help finance the reductions in this year's Poll Tax. Not content with this record of disaster, the Tories now plan to make the reform of inheritance tax the centrepiece of their manifesto. In John Major's words, to provide "a cascade of wealth down the generations". What a joke. Inheritance tax doesn't begin to bite until £140,000 and the average inheritance here in the North West is not much over £10,000.

You'll be better off with Labour.

So we shall be stressing fairness and equity and the fact that the overwhelming majority of people will be **better off** under Labour. But it is not just individuals and families that are high on Labour's agenda. The Party wants to give top priority to the North West and the regions of Britain that have been battered by 13 years of Tory Government.

Election victories just don't happen. We've got to work at it. We've spent much of this year clearing the decks, getting new systems in operation, upping our profile in the local press, getting equipped with a new computer (purchased from donations from Party members) working with our enthusiastic organiser from the NW Region, Malcom Kennedy. Tim, our election agent, and the rest of the Campaign Team are already hard at work getting the election literature ready, the poster sites identified, the window bills printed, the lapel stickers ordered and so on.

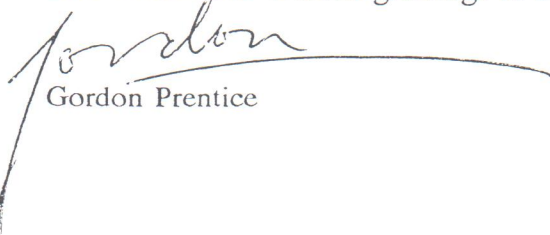
Spare change

The Labour Party stall in Colne Market on Saturdays is going from strength to strength. Caroline and Ian Pickles are both doing a marvellous job in running it with volunteers from Party branches. However, we need half decent things to sell! We need toys, books and other things that are in **good condition** that could be bought as Christmas presents. You can reach Caroline and Ian on 868385. We also need money. Enclosed with this letter is a sticky label for you to put on a jam jar to collect your spare change. When it is full you simply hand it to your Branch secretary. Easy.

Throughout 1991 we've had a number of MPs visit us to lend a hand. There was John Prescott MP, Tony Blair MP, Tony Lloyd MP, Margaret Beckett MP, Robin Cook MP, Gordon Brown MP, Doug Henderson MP, David Blunkett MP and, in December, Joan Lester MP. And we've had tremendous support from my "twin", Peter Pike.

So there we are. We have a good team working for a Labour victory in Pendle. And once we get past Christmas and the New Year the election will be upon us before we know it. So let's prepare ourselves now for some hard work after the holidays. The prize is worth fighting for. A Labour Government that delivers.

Best wishes and seasons greetings to everyone



Gordon Prentice

PPC REPORT TO PENDLE GC: 29 Nov 91

The past month has been a busy one. Since the last GC, the new Parliamentary session has started and we are confronted with the Council Tax Bill (which brings in the Tory replacement to the Poll tax) , the Schools Bill (which privatises the inspectorate and forces schools to publish league tables), the Further and Higher Education Bill, the Asylum Bill and much else besides.

On top of all that we have the controversy over Europe - and simmering on the backburner, the ever present health service reforms. So there is a lot on the political agenda. Labour won the by elections at Hemsworth and Langbaugh. Since Major became Prime Minister the Tories haven't won a single by election.

Earlier this week, I had a phone call from my old happy hunting ground - Hammersmith and Fulham Council. They had a *Carol Thatcher* on their register who hadn't paid her Poll Tax. They thought she was related to *you know who* but weren't entirely sure. The story soon broke and was on the front page of some of the tabloids on Wednesday. Asked about how her mother might take the news, Carol said her mother wouldn't give a ****. This is the kind of thing people will remember. How on earth are councils expected to maintain their services if the Thatchers of this world - who can pay their Poll Tax - choose not to do so!

Out and About

Since the last GC, I have been to a number of excellent events organised by Party branches. The Autumn Fair on 26 October was very successfull in persuading people to buy things they don't really need. I came away with four cactus plants, a wooden nutcracker, a bright red tie and other bits and pieces. The Reedley Branch Social on 8 November was also a step in the right direction and our thanks should go to everyone who had a hand in organising it. A lot of effort was invested and it was a pity it didn't get more support from Party members and the wider public. But those who did turn up seemed to have a good time.

On the 9th November I had an extremely interesting day at the Mechanics Institute in Manchester where I spoke to a gathering of T&G people on Labour's policy for local government. All the regional officials were there so it allowed me to make contact with them all.

On the 16th November I dropped into the Barnoldswick coffee morning at the Weavers Rooms (whose future is still uncertain) and then went on to the stall at Colne. Caroline and Ian Pickles deserve a medal for what they are doing. The stall will pay dividends during the general election campaign.

I canvassed in Barnoldswick (27 October); Vivary Bridge (17 November) and in Barnoldswick and Earby last weekend with the Lewisham people. We had to re-schedule the Brierfield canvass planned for November. I thought the Lewisham visit went extremely well. They certainly enjoyed it (or what they can remember of it through the alcoholic haze!). So thanks to everyone who helped - either by putting people up for the night or by organising the social side or by cooking the pies and mushy peas that went down so well!

On 22 November I spoke to an "All Members Meeting" but it looked suspiciously like an ordinary meeting of the Pendle GC. Alongside all this, I have been in discussion about the future of Carr Road with the T&G and with Philip from the Trades Council, Len and Bill about how we can secure the future of the building for the Labour Movement. I have also been in touch with Paul of the GMB about the Weavers Rooms. Watch this space.

Coming up, I shall be in Manchester tomorrow for a campaign day organised by the NW Region. The following week there is the NHS Campaign Committee in Burnley (6th) and on Saturday the start of the Christmas parties.

The following week, I shall be visiting ELTEC to speak to their Chief Executive. And Joan Lestor will be in Pendle (14 December). After that, "normal politics" is suspended until the New Year when we really roll up our sleeves and do the business.

I have written a short "all members" letter but can I take this opportunity of wishing all GC members a happy Christmas and a guid new year!

Gordon Prentice. Thursday, 28 November 1991

PPC REPORT TO PENDLE GC: 25 OCTOBER 91

The new Parliamentary session - the last before the General Election - begins next Thursday and it is likely to be a blockbuster. The main piece of legislation the Tories need to get through is the Council Tax - their ill thought out replacement to the Poll Tax. Here in Pendle, this will be fertile ground for us given John Lee's professed concern for a 'fair' replacement of the Poll Tax. He said he was dragooned and bullied (my words, I can't remember the quote offhand) into supporting the Poll Tax against his better judgement. There will be no such excuse available next time round.

On other issues, we are boxing the Tories in. On health, education, transport they have very little room to manoeuvre. And we have got an important thing they haven't - momentum. We are back into the mid 40s in the polls and if we carry this lead over the Christmas period into the New Year, we shall be in an immensely strong position in the run up to the General Election.

On the reverse side of this report, I have copied a short note from a colleague of mine at Walworth Road on the Liberal Democrats. It is a useful memory jogger. So when the Lib Dems say they are going to spend more on education, we ask why they have made no attempt to improve the education service in the local authorities they control.

Out and About A lot has happened since the last GC. The Party Conference for one thing. It was widely judged to have been a success in PR terms. Although I was disappointed not to be called to speak (despite every effort!) there were compensations. I made useful contacts with other North West PPCs and did some brief interviews with regional TV and radio.

In Burnley on 7 October, I saw off, with Peter Pike, the Lancashire People's March for Jobs. On the 8th, I did some canvassing in Waterside with Nicola, Tony and other comrades. On the 9th, I visited Smith and Nephew with David Blunkett and Albert Hartleys (thanks go to Edna for setting this up). We popped into the Weavers Rooms for a cup of tea afterwards.

On Sunday 13th, we were canvassing the Ranch in Earby. There are lots of votes there if we can only get them out! Anyway, many thanks to the Earby people for organising this. Last week, I

spoke to a small but interested meeting organised by the Pendle Trades Council on Labour's minimum wage policy. On Friday, I sat in on the Labour Group meeting where a decision was made on car park charges that I now want everyone to stick to. On Sunday, I was canvassing in Barnoldswick.

I want to say a word or two about the stall at Colne. This is a marvellous initiative but, I suspect, is in danger of folding unless Ian and Caroline get some help. They are there from dawn to dusk but if everyone did a little bit a great burden would be lifted from their shoulders. Think of the stall as a way of making money - and take things along you don't want but may be worth a bob or two.

Last Monday, I took Doug Henderson MP around Lontex (thanks to Jerry who helped) and on to Thomas Mason. As the firm is closing it was inappropriate to do a full visit but we had an opportunity to talk about the problems facing the textile industry with the Director and with Paul Hoggarth (who set up the meeting).

We then went on to the Marsden Cross Inn for a lively meeting with local publicans who are experiencing tremendous difficulties with the big brewers. One Conservative councillor, Brian Jackson, the landlord of the White Bear at Barrowford is in danger of losing his pub altogether. This shows how bad things really are.

Coming up, I shall be opening the Pendle Autumn Fair tomorrow and look forward to it. I hope, over the weekend, to do some more soft canvassing. Next weekend I have to be in Belfast. The following week I have provisionally arranged for Joan Lestor to come to Pendle on Friday the 8th although I doubt if she will be able to stay for the Reedley Branch social. On Saturday 9th I am down to speak on local government at a TGWU Conference in Manchester.

Looking much further ahead, a dozen intrepid members of the Lewisham East CLP will be coming up by mini-bus on the weekend of the 22 - 24 November to help us canvass/leaflet here in Pendle. Lewisham East has many of the problems we have in Pendle. In fact, unemployment is twice as high. I am very keen to organise a mini-bus load of Pendle members for a trip to London. They have got lots of canvassing to do but have a Labour Club where we can slake our thirst after a hard day's work!

Finally, I'd like to thank all the people who have been working hard behind the scenes but rarely get any recognition. Biddy

Hilliard has been doing my envelopes for young people every month for almost a year. Amy Spence, too, has been a regular help to me. So thanks to everyone for all the help. I could never do it without such good support.

25.10.91
Prentice

Gordon

PPC REPORT TO PENDLE GC: SEPTEMBER 91

Tomorrow I shall be in Brighton for what will be the last Party Conference before the General Election. As expected, the polls have swung back in our favour as the domestic agenda reasserted itself and we are extremely well positioned to win the election - whenever Major dares to call it. His unwillingness to name the day will backfire on him as people get fed up with the endless speculation.

Events this week have re-inforced the cynicism that people feel about the Tories. First came the news that big pay rises for the judges, admirals and Whitehall mandarins were to be delayed until after the election. (It would be too embarrassing for the Tories to criticise our minimum wage policy while giving the green light to colossal salary increases for the so called "top people".)

Then we had the leaked letter between David Mellor and the noxious Employment Secretary, Michael Howard, in which Mellor proposed cuts in the Tories' training programme of almost £1 billion over the next three years. This revelation powerfully underscored what Labour had been saying about the hidden 4th term manifesto. People really do believe there is something really nasty lurking in the wood shed. They are right. There is.

I have always emphasised the importance of getting the debate on to our political agenda. So far, we have been pretty successful but as we draw closer to the election the Tories and the Liberal Democrats will be trying their hardest to move us on to their ground. I am not going to take the bait. I shall be concentrating on the health service, the economy and jobs and the regeneration of the area. Obviously other issues will surface but these are the core ones for us to hammer away at.

Out and about

The visits by MPs to Pendle are as I reported last month. I shall be at the Burnley Miners Club with Peter Pike and others on 7 October at the launch of the People's March for Jobs (which is going to Blackpool for the Tory Party Conference). On the 9th I shall be with David Blunkett. At the weekend I'll be joining other

comrades in a mass canvass of Earby - so come along and lend a hand. On the 17th, I have been invited by the Trades Council to speak at a public meeting at Silverman Hall on low pay and Labour's proposals for a minimum wage.

The Saturday stall at Colne has been a big success. Jeff Evans and Caroline Pickles are organising this and they'll be asking everyone for bric a brac, second hand books and so on to set out alongside the Labour Party material.

My latest "all members" letter refers to the stall and to our campaign funds which are at an all time low! With an election on the horizon, we are now spending money we haven't got. I've never allowed this kind of thing to depress me as I am the eternal; optimist who believes that money will come in at the end of the day. Well, we are now at 11.55pm and I'm starting to chew my fingernails.

On the campaign side, we have a good team of people hard at work. Cath Mills has taken on the job of getting the support of young people and we want to give her all the help she needs. Since the beginning of the year I have been sending personalised letters to all young people reaching their 18th birthdays - about 800 so far - and we hope to follow this up by sending them a further letter from me together with the Party's "Youth Charter".

We still need help in one or two specialised areas and Tim will no doubt touch on this.

One last thought. The letter from Mike McIlroy in today's Nelson Leader reminded me just how influential letters can be in shaping local opinion. Over the months we've had lots of good, hard hitting letters from Party members published in the local press. A short letter only takes a few minutes to write and it can have a big impact. So, sharpen those pencils and get scribbling!!

Gordon Prentice

Friday, 27 September 1991

PPC REPORT TO PENDLE GC: AUGUST 1991

This is our new press release masthead which we will be using in the forthcoming employment campaign. (More about this below).

Back in January I wrote to all members of the Pendle Party to ask for help and support and to put everyone on red alert for an early General Election. Eight months later we are still waiting for something to happen. I believe we could see an election on 7 November - allowing Major to announce the date on the last day of the Tory Party conference. If he holds off, the options for the Tories will start to narrow dramatically.

We've made good progress in getting our election preparations off the ground but there are still gaps and Tim will no doubt wish to say a few words about these. There is no time to lose with an election, perhaps, only nine weeks away. As I have said on many occasions, there are no prizes in politics for coming second and if we don't make the effort now we will kick ourselves.

Why an early election is possible.

Yesterday, an ICM poll reported that the Tories had cut Labour's lead from 7 to three points with the Tory share rising from 37 to 40%; Labour down from 44% to 43% and the Liberal Democrats down from 16% to 12%. During the summer when Parliament is in recess, the Government always picks up 3% - 4%. Major will be hoping this trend continues through the Conference season and that they have their nose in front in October. In fact, today's papers report the Conservatives have commissioned an intensive round of opinion polling over the next fortnight including detailed surveys of Tory held in the North and Midlands.

If the Tories don't go in November, there are no silver linings in 1992 for them to look forward to. Unemployment will continue to rise throughout 1991 and into 1992 although the rate of increase will undoubtedly slow down. Last month, unemployment reached 2,368,000 after the 16th consecutive monthly rise. (Every rise of 100,000 in unemployment costs an additional £305 million in benefit expenditure). Our new leaflet on unemployment in Pendle giving a June 1991 figure of 2,608 is already out of date. The July figure is 2,752 or 7.1% of the working population. Unfortunately, we can expect further rises over coming months.

Inflation is coming down and is expected to bottom at around 3,5% in October. If it rises after that - even by a tiny amount - it will knock a hole in the Government's claim to have conquered inflation once and for all. For these reasons - if for no other - it would be unwise of us to discount the possibility of a November election.

Carr Road

As you know, the T&G will vacate Carr Road at the end of September although I hope it will be possible to reach an agreement with the union which will allow me to stay until the General Election. It is a roomy building in an ideal location which would be well suited as a resource for the Labour movement locally.

Out and About

Since the last GC at the end of July, I have spoken to the Burnley GC about how they can help us in the run up to the election. (We have been informed by the Regional Office that Ribble Valley CLP is to be twinned with us. I welcome this but not if it is at the expense of our existing links with Burnley CLP. This is something we need to clarify.) Bridget and I spent a glorious day at the Barlick Gala on 3 August and joined a hardy band from the Pendle Party in the sponsored walk to the Clarion House the following day.. Unfortunately, I missed the Trawden Village Show as I was away on holiday.

Tomorrow, I shall be at the Barrowford Show after a spot of campaigning in Barnoldswick. I am also lined up to a surgery in Waterside. I am down to do canvassing in Vivary Bridge later this month and I am keen to help in other wards - just let me have the details.

On the campaigning side our intention is to move the focus to employment and jobs over the next couple of weeks then move to industry and then economy. We then intend to pick up the issue of low pay.

We have Andrew Bennett MP coming to Pendle on 10 September for a photocall with the Ramblers Association. Doug Henderson MP will be here in mid September as part of my Industry 2,000 initiative. David Blunkett will be here on 10 October - by which time there could be real General Election fever. In early October I shall, of course, be at the Brighton Conference. Along with every

other PPC, I shall be doing my share of elbow jabbing to get to the rostrum.

Joan Lestor had been invited to come here on 9 September which co-incides with the school holidays. A blunder on my part I'm afraid. I haven't managed to get an alternative date from Joan yet but I hope to be able to involve her in some kind of initiative to highlight the problem of low pay (especially amongst women) here in Pendle. Gordon Prentice. Friday 30 August.

PPC REPORT TO GMC - 26 JULY 1991

Parliament has now gone into recess for the summer and will not resume until October 14. It ended on a high note for Labour. Today we are 6 points ahead in the polls - confirming a trend which has been apparent for some time. Up until the first week in March the Tories were ahead of us - this was Major's honeymoon. From early March until the end of April, we edged into a lead of a couple of points. From the beginning of May we have pulled strongly ahead and now go into the recess in a strong position.

The Tories are worried. They have had a disastrous few months - first the local elections, Monmouth, divisions over Europe. Then the Army cuts, BCCI, the Council Tax (an eighth property band but no early relief for those on income support forced to pay the 20%). Finally, over the past day or two, the fiasco over the House of Commons Health Committee report. All references to NHS Trusts were excised from the text by the Tories - but were then reproduced - for all to see - as an appendix to the document! Can you believe the incompetence of it all. This is all grist to the mill in my campaign on health issues locally. John Lee has nailed his colours to the mast of the NHS Trusts and is now left defending the indefensible. The result of the staff ballot in Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale has given our campaign a tremendous fillip.

Nationally, the Tories are trying to recover ground through their ridiculous poster campaign *Labour Going for Broke* which they launched in June. It is a hugely expensive campaign - covering more than 1,000 poster sites nationwide - and is the biggest undertaken by any political party outside election time. In a very real sense, the General Election Campaign has already started.

The Tory Strategy: The Tories are using the Citizen's Charter (printed at taxpayers' expense) as the basis of their election manifesto. I have to say it requires a certain brass neck to promise better performance and service delivery from public bodies and utilities after 12 years of cutting back provision, begrudging their very existence and denigrating the people who work in them. Predictably, there are no plans to spend additional money.

Our response must be to show up the Citizen's Charter for what it is - an expensive PR exercise. And we've got to remind people of the citizen's rights that have been abolished, refused or denied by the Tories since they took office in 1979. What about these rights:

* In 1979 everyone had the right to a free eye test. In 1991 it has gone

* In 1979 everyone had the right to a free dental check up. In 1991 it is gone.

* In 1979 a woman in work had a right to be reinstated after she had a baby. Now, if she works for a small firm, that right has gone

* In 1979 students had the same rights to social security benefits as other people. In 1991 they had lost their rights to housing benefit and income support.

So it goes on - hundreds of rights taken away or made more difficult to exercise. And what about the vast increase in the number of people, struggling to get by, who had to rely on these rights. In 1979, 6% of the population (and that was too many then) were living on or below the supplementary benefit level. By 1987 this had increased to 19%. And yet - with this appalling record - the Tories have the impertinence to promise new rights.

Out and About

On Monday I hope to meet local representatives of SPUC (Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child). SPUC has been pressing for my views on abortion and I want to give them the opportunity to discuss the issue with me - at length, if necessary - *before* the election. I have always supported the 1967 Abortion Act and would not wish to see any further restrictions on a woman's right to choose.

On Monday evening I shall be speaking to the Burnley GC. We have had help already from Marcus Johnstone and Steve Holgate but - come the General Election - we will need support from as many Burnley people as possible. In 1981 (the last census) Burnley had the same kind of profile as Pendle although things will have moved on a bit since then. We have a higher level of owner occupation than Burnley (75.5% to 69.6%); a larger ethnic minority population (6.9% to 3.6%) but are (or were) a photo fit in terms of social composition. Peter Pike and the Burnley Party have managed to turn a tiny Labour majority in 1983 into a substantial one of 7,500 in 1987 so there is no need for them to pile up an even bigger majority this time when down the road in Pendle we are straining for every vote.

The table below compares the two constituencies (as if we need reminding):

	Burnley 83	Burnley %	Pendle 83	Pendle %	Burnley 87	Burnley %	Pendle 87	Pendle %
Lab	20,178	39.7	16,604	32.3	25,140	48.4	18,370	35.3
Con	19,408	38.2	22,739	44.2	17,583	33.8	21,009	40.4
Lib	11,195	22.0	12,056	23.5	9,241	17.8	12,662	24.3

Apart from touching on organisational matters, I want to spend some time at the Burnley GC talking about the Liberal Democrats. What happens to the LD vote will decide the election in a number of North West seats.

General Election Campaign Committee: On Thursday we are back into the routine of the Campaign Committee with a number of pressing matters to attend to. We need to finishing loading the register on computer; get the format of the election address finalised and really get cracking on postal and proxy votes. One of my top priorities is to get round old people's homes so any help here would be appreciated.

Other events: On Saturday 3 August, Bridget and I will be at the Barlick Gala and hope to meet lots of people. I have postponed my "Industry 2,000" launch which was originally planned for mid August as Bridget and I will be taking a fortnight's holiday from 12 -25 August. The event - which will involve local business people - will be re-scheduled for mid September. Doug Henderson MP from the Party's Trade and Industry Team will be in Pendle to help me out.

On 3 September, I shall be at PPC briefing at Westminster with Robin Cook and the rest of Labour's Health Team. This will be a good opportunity to get local publicity - perhaps by presenting a petition or something similar. On Monday 9 September, Labour's Shadow Minister for Children, Joan Lestor, will be in Pendle to campaign with me. Any ideas for suitable venues are welcome.

Carr Road: In September, we also face the possibility of a move from the office at Carr Road. As everyone will know, the T&G is trying to bring down to more manageable proportions a large financial deficit and each region has been asked to make savings. The North West Region has decided to close Carr Road and transfer Peter and Fay to the Accrington office. I am currently in negotiations with the NW Region to see if there is another solution.

The one I am pushing for is to postpone any move until the General Election. After the election new possibilities will open up.

Gordon Prentice

Friday 26 July 1991

PPC REPORT TO PENDLE GMC: Friday 28 JUNE 1991

In my report last month I remarked that May had been an eventful month. Well, June hasn't disappointed us either. The Conservative Party has been split down the middle on the "Federal Europe" issue. For the moment, we are content to observe the contest from the sidelines. Labour's formal position is to support closer economic and monetary co-operation within the EC although there are some big, unresolved questions. We also need an informed debate within the Labour Party on what the new European agenda actually means.

On the home front, the controversy over directors' pay rumbles on. And, as expected, we have seen an orchestrated attempt by the Tories over the past month to discredit Labour's policy for a minimum wage (a policy I unreservedly support). I think they are on to a loser. I get the feeling that most people have felt outraged at the enormous increases in boardroom salaries. The actions of the privatised utilities - water, gas and electricity - have made it a lot easier for us to sell our minimum wage policy on the simple grounds of equity. Even the *Financial Times* today (Thursday) recognised the danger (for the Government) of allowing directors to get away with blue murder. The same edition of the FT disclosed that in 1985 the Chairman of British Petroleum was paid 16 times as much as the average member of BP's workforce. Last year he was paid 53 times as much. In the case of the pharmaceutical firm, Glaxo, the multiple went up from 16 times to 41 times! There's plenty of ammunition for us there.

Out and About

NHS anti Opt out Campaign. Over the past month I have been plugging away at the NHS opt out controversy - keeping it a live issue and always getting a good response from people. The health workers will shortly complete their own - union organised - ballot and that should give another shot in the arm to the campaign. The deadline for responses to the Burnley Health Care Trust application is mid August. On Saturday 1 June we took the NHS petition to Nelson and Barnoldswick; on the 8th we went to Earby and on the 15th to Brierfield where the weather was against us. I attended a "Campaign for the NHS" meeting with Peter Pike and others at Burnley on 7 June.

General Election Campaign Committee. On Thursday 6 June (as I reported last month) we had a useful Campaign Committee

meeting with Neil Usher from Walworth Road. He seemed to be relatively happy with the progress we are making. For our part we pressed home the point that we are strapped for cash and any help from the Party nationally would be appreciated. We now have the modem for our computer (a free gift from the computer supplier as a way of apologising for the delay in getting the hardware to us) and we can now send and receive electronic messages from Walworth Road - and other places too.

Getting Party Branches working. On 13 June I was speaking at the Nalگو Conference in Glasgow on Labour's approach to local government reform. I was taken aback to see the familiar - but unexpected - face of Jeff Evans grinning in the front stalls. No escape! On Friday 14 June I was invited to speak to the Horsfield Ward. Marcus Johnstone and Steve Holgate from Burnley had come over for the meeting but only a fraction of the Ward's membership of 28 turned out. Clearly, we have some serious thinking to do about how we can involve the membership and get them to participate. Anne and Roger are as keen as anyone to get the Ward back on its feet.

Advice Surgeries. On 22 June I helped out in the Waterside Advice Surgery with Tony and Nicola and then went on to the Barlick Party's Jumble Sale (where they raised £30 for Branch funds). I would like to do as many surgeries as I can - I find them useful - so can I ask councillors to let me have details and I will put the dates in my Diary. On Sunday 23rd, I did some soft canvassing in Vivary Bridge with half a dozen ward members. My thanks go to them for setting it up.

Liberal Democrats On Saturday 29th June I shall be going to the GMB College in Manchester with Tim for a brain storming session on the Liberal Democrats. This is being organised by the Party nationally and will allow us to swap notes with other CLPs that have LDs to contend with. Unfortunately, I cannot make the special GMC on 1 July as I have to be in London. I shall be in Walton on Polling Day (4 July) and shall be at the LGIU Conference in York that weekend.

After the holidays I shall be speaking to the Burnley GMC on 29 July. I shall be meeting local business people on 15 August as part of my local "Industry 2,000" Campaign. Doug Henderson MP from the Party's Trade and Industry Team will be joining me.

PPC REPORT TO PENDLE GMC: FRIDAY 31 MAY 1991

May was an eventful month. It has been dominated by the local elections and their aftermath - and by developments at Rolls Royce. The elections on 2 May seem light years away now but they were, and still are, important. They signalled a break with the past and should give us all new confidence in our ability to win Pendle at the General Election. I know there will be a report elsewhere on the agenda about the results - I just acknowledge here how good they were. Our vote increased in every ward in the Borough when compared with the 1987 baseline. Even in wards where we didn't win - such as Horsfield and Vivary Bridge - the increase was spectacular.

Nationally, the Party scored a major triumph in Monmouth which ended all speculation about a possible June election. The odds must now be on October or, perhaps, November 7. If Major decides to go for a 1992 election the Press will soon be hounding him to make that clear. We must start serious planning for an Autumn election. (More about this later).

May was also the month of dogs (does Frank Clifford have a Pit Bull Terrier?) and the NHS. The Press seems to be detecting signs of "health fatigue" amongst the general population but I suspect people are as concerned now as they ever were. I shall be beavering away on opt out, keeping it a live issue. The consultation period runs until the middle of August so it will be a half marathon rather than a sprint. Inevitably, other issues will come to prominence over the coming months but we shouldn't lose sight of the of health as a vote winner for us. My request to spend a day (unpaid) as a porter/cleaner at Burnley General has, apparently, been turned down by the hospital management. I have also heard from the Regional Health Authority who confirm they will not be acting on my proposal to hold a ballot of all 4,000 staff on the opt out proposals. This is no surprise as the RHA could not guarantee the right answer.

The Government's response to Monmouth and the NHS has been a spate of white papers and consultative papers. First, local government structure, then finance. Apparently they want to know what we all think of the "council tax". Then we had a White Paper on Higher Education and another on Education and Training. More are in the pipeline. This is the fodder for the Tory General Election manifesto. At this stage, we must not concede that there is any real possibility of the proposals actually being implemented. This is no easy task. The Tories have been in

power for so long, large numbers of people believe that whatever a Tory minister says will inevitably happen. Once perhaps. But no longer.

Elsewhere, Rifkind has flagged up the privatisation of British Rail (but no new serious money for the railways. And the former public utilities (now privatised) are returning big profits. £3 billion from British Telecom (one of the biggest rip offs of all time according to one Tory MP) and, yesterday, £1.5 billion from British Gas. Massive pay rises throughout the boardrooms of British industry have caught public attention and in a few cases (eg Rolls Royce) directors have thought it wise - for PR reasons - to ask for their salaries to be cut. The biggest hypocrite of the lot - the Governor of the Bank of England - still stoutly defends his 17% increase on the grounds that he is "catching up" on more modest increases in previous years!

The Tories believe they can win the General Election by getting low inflation, by engineering falling interest rates and stealing some Labour policies (such as the Citizen's Charter). They will also unleash an attack on what they consider to be Labour's weak policy areas. The foremost example here, must be our proposals for a minimum wage which is scorned by all Tories as a policy which would wreck jobs. John Lee, notorious for his 90 sackings at Country Holidays, is dead against a minimum wage apparently for that reason. The Tories detest the idea of a minimum wage because it goes against everything they believe in. But rather than be honest about it, they make up figures for the number of jobs that it will lose. Take the Employment Secretary, Michael Howard, as an example. (All figures from Hansard).

- * On 6 February 1991 he said it would destroy 750,000
- * By 19 April it had increased to 1 million jobs
- * On 22 April Howard now says it will destroy 2 million jobs

Out and About Now that the local elections are behind us I want to get back to regular soft canvassing to get information which can be fed into the computer for direct mail shots in the run up to the General Election. I'd therefore like to hear from Party branches. I'm also on the lookout for invitations for factory visits so if you can help get me an introduction please let me know.

I did a joint press conference on 3 May with Janet Anderson (Rossendale) and Greg Pope (Hyndburn). It was covered by Radio Lancashire. I enjoyed the Victory Social on 5 May. It was good of Peter Pike to drop in and show his face. As many people will

know, I was invited by Peter to join him and Margaret Beckett on the Burnley May Day March. Unfortunately, I was given a speaking slot rather far down in the batting order! In fact, when I was called to the wicket light was fading and the crowd had all, but disappeared! I decided not to speak but give Peter the chance of a second go. Pendle CLP was well represented. Tim had decked out his Land Rover.

On 16 May I attended the Annual Council meeting and was astonished by the loutish, ill mannered and completely over the top behaviour of the Liberals. London local authorities are models of decorum by comparison. The Liberals also showed a complete disregard for the English language. One moment we were Stalinist. The next, Fascist. I think of them as "Childish". That's my contribution to the debate.

On 17 May I had a great time at the Barrowford ceilidh. On 18 May I joined the "Campaign for the NHS" people outside the Arndale Centre and on 19 May I shared a pew with John Lee at the Mayoral service (not a nice experience!). Tomorrow, I shall be at Colne doing the NHS petition. Next Thursday we are having our next meeting of the Campaign Committee with Neil Usher from Walworth Road. He will bring a fresh eye to it all. Gordon Prentice

PPC Report to Pendle GMC: Friday 26 April 1991

The Local Elections: The past month has been dominated by the local elections. Tony Lloyd MP launched the election campaign and got some good press coverage. I have written to thank him for giving us his time and have hinted we will want him back again during the General Election campaign. I have concentrated my canvassing and doorstep work in the marginals - mainly Horsfield and Waterside - while briefly dropping into a few other wards. On the whole, I've received a pretty good reception and I sense we are going to do fairly well. Others will have a much better feel of what is happening across the constituency. (Unfortunately, I missed the profile of Pendle which was broadcast on Radio 4's *The World Tonight* on Monday so I have no idea if the coverage was sympathetic.) Elsewhere, I have been out and about visiting (again) Burnley General. Tomorrow I shall be speaking in Barrowford with Peter Pike on the Poll Tax. The meeting has been organised by the Trades Council.

General Election preparations: After many false alarms we now have our Opus computer and printer together with the electoral register disks. Unfortunately it came too late for use in the local election campaign. My thanks go to all those who contributed to the General Election Fund to make this purchase possible. We raised over £1,200 in a few months - not a bad feat. However, we will need four times as much again to run a first class campaign here in Pendle.

On 11 May, Tim and I will be going to a General Election training day - organised by the North West Region.

On the policy side, we shall be playing to our strengths here in Pendle. There are three key areas which will dominate. First, the economy. Labour is now clearly associated in the public mind as the Party with most to say about manufacturing industry. The economy is still in a nosedive with unemployment soaring upwards. Here in Pendle, between March 1990 and February 1991 there was a 31% increase in unemployment (from 1,742 to 2,286). And that doesn't include the 90 jobs lost in John Lee's Country Holidays.

Unfortunately, we were unable to save the Job Centre in Barnoldswick - despite the intervention of Peter Pike, Tony Blair and Tony Lloyd and the sterling work of the Party in Barnoldswick. Job Centres have been hived off to a separate agency and this allows the Government to disclaim any responsibility. Still, people have long memories about some things and - as unemployment becomes an ever more prominent issue - the closure of the Job Centre will seem perverse.

Secondly, the Poll Tax and its replacement is still a live issue. Of the three alternatives on offer, Labour's Fair Rates is best for Pendle. I shall be plugging away at this issue - especially at the fact that the Poll Tax will survive for another couple of years (if the Tories are re-elected). The revelation - from none other than Norman Tebbit's secretary - that the new Council Tax was "grossly inequitable" said it all. The Liberal Democrats have shot themselves in the foot over their Local Income Tax plans. Contrary to their misleading claims, it is not the option most favoured by the general public. That accolade goes to Labour's Fair Rates!

The third area where we are on strong ground is the NHS. The prospect of getting public support for the Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale opt out proposal must be fading rapidly following today's announcement that Guy's Hospital in London (the first to secure Trust status) is planning to cut 600 jobs and £6m from its budget this year. Bridget will be heavily involved in the campaign as Guys is in the Lewisham Health District.

I shall be in Pendle for a good part of next week - and on Polling Day.

Gordon Prentice

26 April 1991

PPC Report to Pendle GMC: 22 March 1991

Attending the GC is at the top of my list of priorities but today something personal intervenes! My nephew is getting married in Glasgow and Bridget and I will be there celebrating with the rest of them. Please accept my apologies.

Ribble Valley and the Liberal Democrats

When I gave my last report to the February GC (ie the Annual Meeting) we were in the middle of the Ribble Valley By Election. Labour's campaign held up well until the last few days before polling when our support collapsed to the Liberal Democrats. Many of our traditional voters went to the LDs who were seen to have the best chance of beating the Tories. GC members (and others) who went to Ribble Valley to help out will know the fall in our vote did not signify any disenchantment or antipathy towards the Party. On the contrary we got a good reception on the doorsteps.

However, there are lessons for us in the Ribble Valley result.

*We must keep reinforcing the key message that we are the only alternative to the Tories. But to give this claim credibility we must be seen to have a presence on the streets - leafletting, canvassing, knocking on doors. We won't be believed if we say we are chasing the Tories hard and there are orange posters everywhere!

*We must take on the LDs in an up front way. The Party nationally may want to pretend they don't exist - or are merely an irritant - but here in Pendle we've got to take the gloves off. At the weekend, Paddy Ashdown said the LDs would be prepared to do a deal with the Conservatives after the next General Election if no Party had an outright majority. This was a major blunder on his part. Our message must be that if you want to get rid of the Tories - don't risk voting Liberal Democrat. The chances are they'll keep the Tories in power. I am currently working on a dossier of LD policies which, I hope, we can dip into in the local election campaign. Some (like Local Income Tax) can sound attractive but are impractical. Others (such as the proposal to allow private operators to run trains on BR track) are simply zany.

Other activities: I have been out on the doorsteps again at Barrowford (2 March) and Barnoldswick (9 March). Unfortunately, I had to cancel a scheduled Advice Team Canvass at Vivary Bridge on 3 March but I hope to rearrange this shortly. Sally and Linda set up a photocall at Barlick Job Centre on 26 February with Margaret Beckett MP and Sue Nike and we got some very positive press coverage.

On 1 March, John Prescott visited the Nelson Fire Station. He was extremely impressed (as I was) by the superb display put on for us by the firefighters and the fire brigade top brass. Again we got some good coverage in the local press. Joe French did a tremendous job in arranging the visit at less than 12 hours notice.

Later that week, the T&G arranged a visit to William Reed Weaving for the Party's Employment spokesperson, Tony Blair. It went very well although there were fewer people at the mill than I had expected. Just rows and rows of weaving machines. I am always on the lookout for invitations to workplaces where I can meet people so please keep those invitations and suggestions coming.

On 8 March I visited Ithaad and Janet's Footwear factory with Rajah before going on to Morecambe for the opening session of the NW Regional Conference. On 9 March we did a successful Child Benefit Stunt in Colne and Barnoldswick - the brainchild of Malcolm Kennedy, our organiser. The petition was launched the week before and we got over 600 signatures which I have presented to John Lee. Lots of people helped but Gill Lee's giant Mother's Day card did the trick in getting us Press coverage.

Last weekend (15 - 17 March) I was at a PPC media training session in north London organised by the Party nationally. This was one of a series for PPCs in key constituencies. Tomorrow (19 March) I shall be speaking to the Pendle Trades Council. For the next month and a bit all our energies must be directed at getting a Labour Council in Pendle. We've never had a better chance.

The Tories are in disarray. They have been forced to scrap the poll tax (but as I write no-one knows the precise form of its replacement) and are about to launch into a major reform of local government. It is being done for political expediency and for no other reason. No-one believes the Tories would have embarked on such a major upheaval had it not been for the Poll Tax and the damage it has done to them. The Tories will do anything now to cling to power. I am writing this before the Budget but I suspect

there will be nothing in it to frighten the voters. The Tories are clearing the decks for the General Election and we've got to be ready. In Pendle, as elsewhere, we won't get a second chance.

Gordon Prentice

18 March 1991

Report to Pendle GMC: Sunday 24.2.91

Since the last GMC on 25 January I have been out and about the constituency - making contact with the electorate and getting to grips with the main issues facing the constituency. Once again, my thanks go to the hardy band of helpers who have been out on the doorstep with me.

Pendle Labour Advice Team: Since the January GC we have been out in Southfield and Waterside (26 January), Vivary Bridge (1 February), Horsfield (16 February) and Waterside again (17 February). (I was in Nottingham for the Party's Local Government Conference from 8 - 10 February). Barrowford is down in the diary for 2 March.

Other Activities: I have been involved in the anti opt out campaign and getting to know the people on the NHS Campaign Committee which meets over in Burnley. We staged a modest demo and did some leafletting outside the Arndale Centre on 1 February which got covered in the Leader. And despite appalling weather, about 50 brave souls struggled through the snow to the meeting I did with Robin Cook and Peter Pike at the Silverman Hall on 7 February. I paid a fleeting visit to the Women's Section coffee morning in Brierfield Town Hall last weekend before going on to do some doorstep work. Over time, these Women's Section coffee mornings will raise the profile of the Party amongst key sections of the electorate. It's good to have this kind of event going on and I hope they get the support they deserve.

Future Work: I have been in Ribble Valley for the By Election for the past week or so. Tomorrow I shall be meeting Eric Cooper from Cohse at Calderstones Hospital to discuss the NHS Campaign. On Tuesday I shall be in Pendle with Tony Blair visiting Lontex and Albert Hartleys in Barnoldswick. We'll also do a photocall outside the Barnoldswick Job Centre which is earmarked for closure. My thanks go to Sally and Linda and Edna and Jerry for setting everything up. I shall be doing my best to get John Prescott and some other front benchers over to Pendle over the next few weeks.

After polling day on 7 March I shall be off to Morecambe for the NW Regional Conference - returning to Colne on Saturday morning I shall be doing a Mother's Day stunt with Party Members. This has been organised by Malcolm Kennedy, our organising assistant. On March 11 I shall be speaking to the T&G District Committee in

Accrington and on 15 - 17 March I'll be away on a PPC Training Course. On 19 March I shall be meeting the Pendle Trades Council.

The By Election is occupying all my waking hours and The Party needs all the help it can get. When we say we are second to the Tories it doesn't sound too convincing to the voters if there is little evidence of the Labour Party on the ground. Ribble Valley is the 10th safest Tory seat in the country - but socialists live there and deserve all the support we can give them. GP

PPC REPORT TO PENDLE GMC: FRIDAY 25 JANUARY 1991

Pendle Labour Advice Team. I have now started a regular programme of doorstep canvassing as part of the Pendle Labour Advice Team. The response has been extremely positive and my thanks go to all the Party members who have been out with me. So far, we've canvassed in Barnoldswick and in Brierfield (where we doubled up with a survey on a local planning issue) and tomorrow I shall be out in Southfield and Waterside Wards. Vivary Bridge is lined up for next weekend and Barrowford after that.

Campaign HQ. After a bit of a delay, I'm glad to report the Campaign HQ at 33 Carr Road is now fitted out with a phone and ansaphone. Any calls we get as a result of the canvassing will be transcribed and passed to me for reply. Where they are clearly about council issues I shall pass them on to the local Labour councillor (where there is one). My thanks go to the T&G for providing the office accommodation. It has been very supportive.

Finance. My next immediate objective is to get a half decent computer for use in the campaign. We need to target groups of voters - such as pensioners - with direct mail shots and we can't do it properly with paper and pencil. I have now done a welcoming letter to first time voters and this will be going out shortly. Everything on this front depends on raising money and I shall be making an appeal to Party members for contributions to our General Election Fund. Obviously, I don't want to cut across anything the Party is doing but raising money for the election can't wait. There are other developments on the organisational side and Tim will want to touch on these in his report.

The Health Service. My 'twin', Peter Pike, is giving me a lot of help and is fixing up a public meeting in Nelson on Thursday 7 February. I shall be on the platform with Peter and Robin Cook. I shall do my best to get Robin for some time during the day to do a walkabout or photocall at an appropriate local venue such as Hartley Hospital. (Other ideas please.)

Poll Tax. Heseltine has come up with an interim solution to the poll tax problem. He has targeted marginal constituencies such as Pendle for special treatment. We will be getting an area protection grant which will bring Poll Tax bills down - sometimes

quite dramatically. However, the issue is still a winner for us - there are new anomalies and further unfairnesses in the Heseltine scheme which we can exploit. My public response has been to welcome the announcement as bringing some long overdue relief.

The Gulf: You will have seen my reported response in the Nelson

Leader last week. It said I was sad that sanctions had not been given more time to work but that I pledged my support for the war. It ended with a direct quote: "Sanctions have been overtaken by events. Our servicemen and women's lives are on the line and we have just got to hope and pray that there will be a quick end to the war." The report - which massively compressed my conversation with the Nelson Leader - accurately states my public position.

Everyone in the Party will have their own views on this tragic conflict and these deserve to be respected. In particular, I respect the views of the pacifists who, in no circumstances, would ever support war. However, this is not my view. My firm position was to support sanctions. I am convinced these would have worked given the extent of the international coalition ranged against Saddam Hussein. Even Libya had called for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait.

However, sanctions were not given time to work and the Middle East was plunged into war. It could have been averted. After the August invasion, Morocco had tried to convene a Conference of muslim states to work out an Arab solution to the crisis. Iraq chose not to take up the invitation and the initiative foundered. And just before the UN deadline expired on January 15, Saddam Hussein spurned the approach of the UN Secretary General who offered a Middle East peace conference in return for the Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. Had this offer been accepted, there would be no war now.

Of course Britain and the United States do not come to this conflict with clean hands. America was one of the largest suppliers to Iraq of strategic materials and food during the long Iraq/Iran war. Britain was even training Iraqi military personnel here in this country until March 1990. It was common knowledge at the time that Hussein was a ruthless and crazed dictator who had massacred the Kurds and used chemical and biological weapons quite indiscriminately. Other Western countries were helping Iraq build up its military machine. So there is a stench of hypocrisy in the air.

My own view is that the UN resolution should be enforced. After the war ends we do not want to see a new Pax Americana but a powerful and confident United Nations setting an agenda for lasting peace in the middle east. In my view, this must include full self determination for the Palestinians together with the acknowledgement of the right of the state of Israel to exist within secure, internationally recognised frontiers. We must remove from the face of the globe all chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. And we must stop the arms trade once and for all.